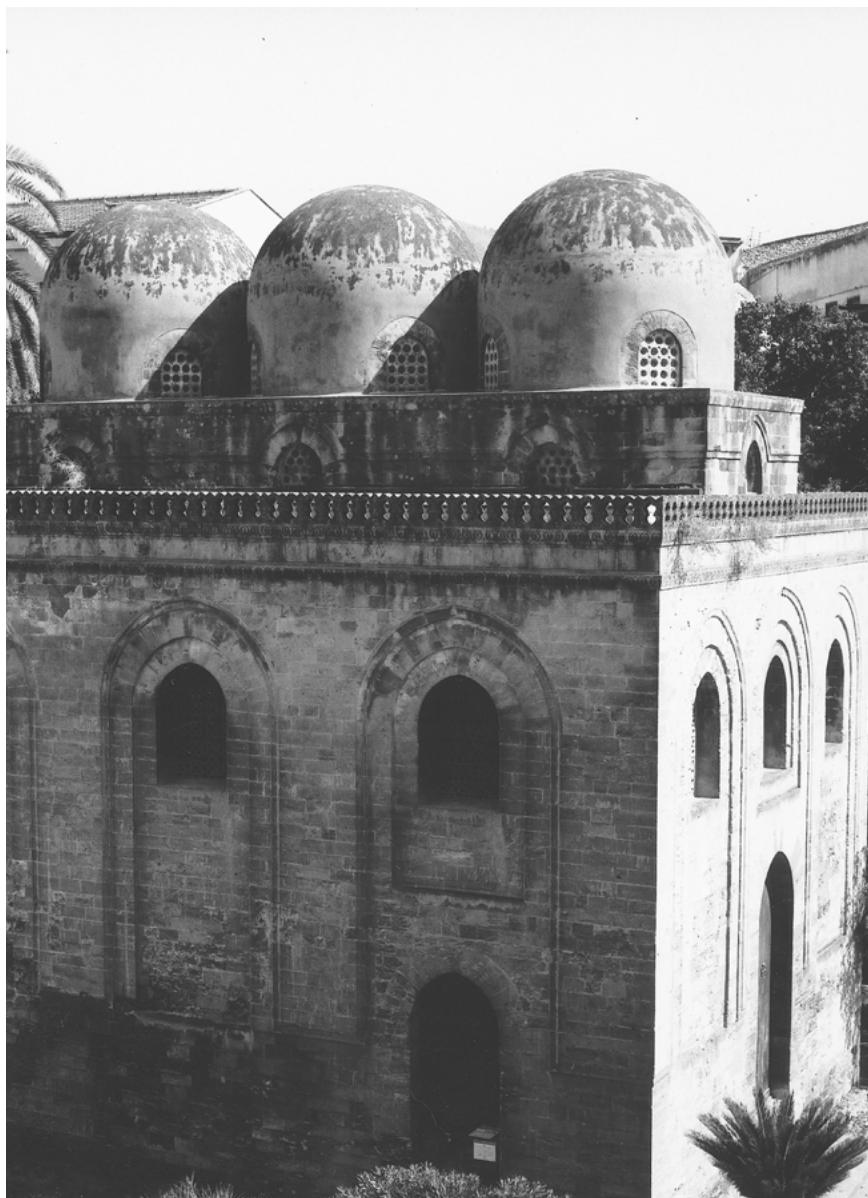


The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250



The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250

A Literary History

KARLA MALLETTÉ

PENN

University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia

The Middle Ages Series
Ruth Mazo Karras, Series Editor
Edward Peters, Founding Editor

A complete list of books in the series is available from the publisher.

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by
University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mallette, Karla.

The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250 : a literary history / Karla Mallette.
p. cm. — (The Middle Ages series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8122-3885-0 (cloth : alk. paper)
1. Italian literature—Italy—Sicily—History and criticism. 2. Italian literature—To 1400—
History and criticism. 3. Sicily (Italy)—History—1016-1194. 4. Sicily (Italy)—History—
1194-1282. I. Title. II. Series.
PQ5902.S52M35 2005
850.9'9458'09021—dc22

2005042094

Frontispiece: San Cataldo, Palermo. (Author's photo)

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I. Toward a Literary History of the Kingdom of Sicily

IN THE YEAR 1184, Ibn Jubayr, an Andalusian returning from the Meccan pilgrimage, was shipwrecked in Sicily. At the time he arrived, the Normans, who had seized control of the island from the Muslims, had been in power for a little more than a century. The great Norman king Roger II had ruled and died; his son William I had ruled and died. The current Sicilian monarch, William II, welcomed the travelers to Sicily in person, and paid the landing fee for the Muslims on Ibn Jubayr's ship. In his account of his visit to Sicily, which forms one chapter of his description of his travels through the Mediterranean, Ibn Jubayr describes William and his court in some detail. He counts William's admiration of Islamic learning and tolerance of Islamic religious practice at his court among the wonders that he witnessed on his journey. He also takes pains to illustrate through interviews and anecdotes the difficult daily lives of Muslim Sicilians. From these paradoxical elements, Ibn Jubayr attempts to produce a coherent portrait of a Christian land where Muslim visitors are honored and Islamic learning and culture are embraced in the royal court, but Muslim citizens endure economic and religious injustices, mourn the fall of the Islamic state, and dream of escape to a better land.

In the introductory section of his chapter on Sicily, Ibn Jubayr describes Messina, the first Sicilian city he visited. And he lays out programmatically the paradox of Muslim-Christian cohabitation on the island. Following these prefatory comments, he describes his travels through Sicily by relating events in the order in which they occur. But in the introductory section his organization is thematic, rather than chronological. He aims to convey to his readers the central difficulty he encountered in Sicily. The island's Muslim conquerors have themselves been conquered, and the culture that is now emerging resists categorization. Ibn Jubayr is a vigorous and effective narrator, and he finds an evocative way to represent the ambiguity of Sicilian culture.

Sicily's approach is announced to the travelers on board Ibn Jubayr's ship by a glimpse of one of the island's best-known landmarks, Etna—*jabal al-nar*, the “Mountain of Fire” in Arabic. Soon after they catch sight of the volcano, a storm arises and blows the travelers into the strait between the Italian mainland and the island, where the ship founders on rocks. Ibn Jubayr heightens the drama of the scene by telling us that the seas in the strait of Messina seethe around the ship like boiling water, and he compares the force of the waters to the “bursting of the dam.” He refers to the dam of Ma'rib, which collapsed under the pressure of flood waters with such destructive effect that it constituted an epoch-making event for the Arab tribes, and is

remembered in the Qur'an (34:16). After this stirring episode, he describes his arrival in Sicily, his visit to the Norman monarch's court, and his meetings with Muslim businessmen and merchants. Later in his narrative, Ibn Jubayr lists some of the natural wonders of Sicily, returning finally to the most renowned of Sicily's marvels—Mount Etna. In describing Etna, he repeats a metaphor he had used while describing the shipwreck. Here are the culminating sentences of his description: "There is a lofty mountain on the island known as the Mountain of Fire. A marvelous thing is reported concerning it, and that is that during certain years fire comes forth from it *like the bursting of the dam*. It burns everything it passes until it reaches the sea, and then it rides atop the surface of the waves until it sinks beneath them [emphasis added]." The image of the dam of Ma'rib recurs: fire bursts from Etna like the waters bursting through the dam. In both this passage and the shipwreck scene, Ibn Jubayr quotes the words used in the Qur'an to describe the event. The repetition of the Qur'anic phrase brackets the introductory section, and sets it off from the chronological description of Ibn Jubayr's travels in Sicily that follows. They leave in the reader's mind a sense of awesome and antagonistic natural forces, encouraging us to see Sicily as a theater of remarkable phenomena.¹

In his prefatory comments to the description of his visit to Sicily, Ibn Jubayr details what is most strange and disturbing in the Sicilian situation. His ship, on arriving at the port of Messina after the harrowing shipwreck, had been greeted by William II, who himself paid the landing fee for all the Muslims on board the ship—the first of the marvels of Sicily we read about that is not connected with natural phenomena. Ibn Jubayr catalogues the wonders of the court of William II, the "Orientalist" Christian monarch, whom he commends for his learning and in particular for his admiration of Muslim culture and his promotion of Muslim men of learning at his court. William speaks Arabic. Like contemporary Muslim princes, he uses an 'alama, an Arabic royal title, on coinage, in architectural inscriptions, and in the heading of his official documents. He retains Muslim physicians and astrologers. Ibn Jubayr's description of William's court culminates with a famous anecdote of an earthquake, when the palace rang with the sound of William's servants—many of whom observed Christian ritual publicly, in order to serve the monarch, but remained Muslims in belief—calling on Allah, in the moment of crisis, for preservation. William, unperturbed, said only, "Let each of you call upon the god you have faith in; let that bring peace to you."²

Ibn Jubayr consistently describes Christian tolerance of Muslim Sicilians in general, and individual Christians' kindness to him and his fellow travelers, in tones of wonder—as he does the flames of Etna. At the same time, he dwells

on the suffering of Muslim Sicilians, and the difficulties of their lives under Norman occupation. Alongside the marvels of Sicily, alongside the Mountain of Fire and the splendors of William's court, he rehearses the details of Muslim-Christian cohabitation, attempting to understand what Sicily has become and what the future may hold for Muslim Sicilians. The turbulent and uncanny images of fire and water that bracket this introductory section may be read as a metaphor for the two populations. And his deployment of the same Qur'anic phrase to describe these two fantastic events—his use of the floodwaters of the burst dam to evoke both the seething sea and the lava surging from Etna toward the waters of the Mediterranean—evokes his fear of the shifting balance of power, and his anxiety concerning Christian ventriloquism of Muslim cultural practices, considered by many contemporary witnesses to be among the most disturbing marvels of Sicily.

Ibn Jubayr tells us that Muslim culture is respected and patronized by the Sicilian monarch. Yet the two instances of open toleration of individual Muslims by William II that he sketches come only in response to calamity. A tempest provokes the king's payment of the landing fees for the shipwrecked Muslims, and an earthquake inspires his proclamation of religious tolerance. On the one hand, William admires Islamic culture and promotes it at his court. But on the other, it takes a natural disaster to draw from him acts of charity and tolerance toward his Muslim subjects. This interpretive knot—the balancing of tolerance and repression, the tension between Islamic culture and Muslim citizens—is the paradox at the center of Ibn Jubayr's assessment of Sicily. The celebration of Islamic culture he witnessed in Sicily constituted the flaunting of a trophy culture. By promoting Islamic culture at his court, the Sicilian monarch expressed a gratifying recognition of the accomplishments of the Muslim world. But he also advertised the fact that, in Sicily, those accomplishments had come under the control of Christians. The Muslims who had conquered Sicily three and one-half centuries earlier had treasured its beauty and its riches. With the Norman conquest—which occurred at roughly the same time as the first Christian seizure of Muslim-occupied lands in the Iberian peninsula; Palermo fell to the Normans in 1070, and Christian forces took Toledo in 1072—the Muslims had lost a prized possession, as they had also in Ibn Jubayr's native al-Andalus. Muslim Sicilians' struggle for cultural and economic survival under Norman rule was as intricate and brutal as the battle of the elements Ibn Jubayr evokes in his descriptions of storms and volcanos. And Christian possession of Muslim culture may have appeared to the Muslim visitor as unnatural and disturbing as the fires that burst from a mountain like water through the burst dam of Ma'rib.

When the Normans occupied Sicily, along with the natural riches of the

island, they took possession of its cultural wealth, its bureaucratic and cultural institutions. A hybrid culture emerged, one that used Islamic literary, artistic, and architectural conventions to celebrate a kingdom ruled by a Christian monarch. Under the Normans, Sicilian court poets wrote in Arabic. Following the death of William II, during the reign of Frederick II (1197–1250), Sicily would see an act of literary invention that was less extraordinary than the marvel Ibn Jubayr witnessed—Arabic cultural forms used to adorn and celebrate a Christian state—but more significant in its impact on subsequent literary history. During the thirteenth century, Sicilians would write the first substantial body of lyric poetry in an Italianate vernacular. Like fire morphing into water, the language of culture in Sicily underwent a rapid and radical transformation between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, a literary and linguistic revolution that remains one of the most striking and least understood chapters in medieval literary history.

* * *

Sicily, Cicero wrote in the *Verrine Orations*, was “the first of the provinces; Sicily first taught our ancestors how glorious it could be to rule other peoples.” Indeed, between antiquity and the Middle Ages, the island invited conquest from every shore of the Mediterranean. The ancient Greeks, the Romans, and the Byzantine Greeks took turns ruling it before the arrival of the Arabs. Following the period of Norman and Swabian rule, it would be governed by Angevin and Aragonese sovereigns. Each of these conquerors brought their own linguistic traditions to the island. But at no time was Sicilian linguistic culture more complex than during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—which comprised, perhaps not coincidentally, the only era when Sicily was governed as an independent kingdom, not as a colonial extension of a mainland state.

When the first Norman invaders stormed Sicily in 1038, the Arabs had ruled the island for roughly two hundred years. The earliest Arab military activity on the island which was more than an act of piracy but rather executed for the purposes of conquest had occurred in 827. At that time, Sicily was a Greek state. The Greco-Sicilian government did not stand long against the Arab invasion. Three years after the first Arab attack, in 830, Palermo fell to the invaders, and in 878 the Arabs took Syracuse, the last significant Christian stronghold on the island.

The years of Muslim domination on the island were turbulent, as the state reacted first to the upheavals that rocked the greater Muslim world during this period, and later to internal struggles. During the middle decades of the tenth century, the Kalbite dynasty gained power in Sicily, increasing

its cultural and political independence from the North African governors. Despite continuing domestic unrest, the next century was the most peaceful and prosperous in Muslim Sicily's brief history and constituted the state's cultural "golden age."

The Norman conquest of Sicily, like the Muslim invasion that had taken place two centuries earlier, was a swift and decisive affair. The first assault, undertaken in 1038 by a contingent of Normans, Lombards, and Greeks, had little appreciable effect on the Muslim state. Robert Guiscard arrived in Sicily in 1046 to try again. In 1060 his brother, Roger, joined him for another attempt. And in 1072 the Norman forces, led by Robert and Roger, took the administrative center of Arab Sicily, Palermo.

Roger ruled as count of Sicily until his death in 1101. His son, Roger II, became count of Sicily in 1105, at the age of nine. He would be made king of Sicily in 1130, and would be remembered as the greatest of the Norman monarchs of Sicily. His son, William I, known as "William the Bad," ruled from 1154 until 1166, and his grandson, William II, or "William the Good," ruled from 1166 until 1189. On the second William's death the triumphant years of Norman rule in Sicily came to an end, as a series of short-lived monarchs and squabbles over succession brought unrest and civil war to the kingdom.

Cultural development in Sicily during the period of Norman domination built on and transformed the culture of Muslim Sicily. When Muslims occupied Sicily, they found a Greek state in cultural decadence. Certainly, the absence of established bureaucratic institutions on the island contributed—along with unrest both in Sicily and abroad—to the relative barbarity of cultural life on the island during the first century of Muslim rule.³ When the Normans arrived, however, they encountered a state just entering its cultural prime. Rather than replace indigenous cultural practices and idioms with their own, as contemporary Norman conquerors did in Britain, the Normans adopted and adapted the cultural practices they found in Sicily. They took over many of the bureaucratic institutions established by Muslim Sicilians. They used Arabic, alongside Greek and Latin, as a language of bureaucracy and culture. They hired Arabic artists and artisans to build their monumental architectural projects. And they encouraged the composition of Arabic poetry in their praise.

The culture of Norman Sicily was at once triumphant and ephemeral. The death of William II in 1189 would in effect bring an end to the Norman Sicilian experiment, the unique cultural hybrid that developed during the years of Norman rule. With the ascent of Frederick II to the throne, Sicilian culture underwent a substantial transformation. Frederick—the son of Hohenstaufen emperor Henry VI and Roger II's daughter, Constance—articulated

much stronger political, economic, and cultural ties between Sicily and the European continent. He also maintained connections with Arab rulers and intellectuals. However, he did not support Arabic cultural production within Sicily, and during his reign, the last Muslim communities in Sicily were uprooted and transplanted to a ghetto city on the Italian mainland. Most importantly, it was under Frederick's rule that a group of poets wrote the first lyric love poetry in an Italian vernacular. The Kingdom of Sicily was reinvented as a Latinate Christian territory.

Literary historians writing about the Romance vernacular poetry produced in Sicily during the thirteenth century—the so-called *scuola siciliana*—typically see that body of work in a continuum with the Occitan lyric and French epic of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Indeed, the Sicilian poets were intimately acquainted with the Romance vernacular literature that preceded them, and interrogation and explication of their relation to the Romance vernacular traditions of the European mainland were crucial parts of their poetic project. However, that poetic project cannot be described through reference to the continental poets alone. The Sicilian Romance poets wrote *toward* the Romance vernacular traditions of the European mainland, but they wrote *from* a land with more complex cultural affiliations. During the twelfth century, Sicilians wrote in Latin, Greek, and Arabic. Because of its difficulty, its entanglement in too many cultural traditions, the literary production of twelfth-century Sicily has been largely passed over by literary historians. What work has been done on this period has been parceled out to scholars working within disciplinary boundaries. The Arabic literature is handled by Arabists, the Latin texts by Latinists, and the Greek by Byzantinists.⁴ This fragmentation has not only affected our understanding of the literary history of twelfth-century Sicily. It has also impoverished our readings of the literary tradition that emerged during the thirteenth century. Literary historians have not considered the poets of the thirteenth century in the context of a Sicilian literary tradition for two reasons. First, that literary tradition is not widely known or understood by scholars. And second, literary historians—who are generally trained to think within the boundaries of disciplines defined by the national languages of modern Europe—do not perceive a coherent literary tradition in the linguistically fragmented literary production of twelfth-century Sicily. Thus, by a circular logic, literary historians do not know the literary history of the Kingdom of Sicily because the multiplicity of linguistic traditions present in Sicily convinces them that the state did not have a literary history as such.

The fundamental assumption of this study is that the Kingdom of Sicily generated a literary tradition with a continuity constituted in particular by a

shifting relation to linguistic complexity. Literary production during the twelfth century evidenced two distinct kinds of linguistic complexity. Sicilians wrote in the three formal literary languages of the medieval Mediterranean, observing a rough division of labor between them. In Latin, Sicilians wrote histories recording the deeds of the Normans in Sicily, as well as translations of philosophical works from the Greek and the Arabic. Greek was used mainly for pastoral works. And Sicilian poetry was written in Arabic. In addition, Sicilians produced a small number of multilingual texts, combining diverse linguistic registers. These were typically nonliterary texts, in particular architectural and numismatic inscriptions. But they provide valuable information for the literary historian, demonstrating an alternate response—alongside composition in the three formal literary tongues—to the linguistic complexity of the state. A vernacular literary tradition would emerge only in the generation following the death of William II, during the reign of Frederick II. During the twelfth century, Sicilian poets wrote in Arabic. With the collapse of Arabic literacy in Sicily, during the early decades of the thirteenth century, poets invented another linguistic medium for poetry, generated on the continental Romance vernacular model and based on the Romance vernacular spoken in Sicily. They used that new literary language to produce an intervention in continental poetic practice informed by both chronological and geographical factors. The Sicilians wrote after a series of Romance vernacular avant-gardes had challenged the literary hegemony of the Latin tradition. And they wrote from the geographical margins of the Christian world.

The literature of Norman Sicily has been overlooked not only for pragmatic reasons, because of its linguistic complexity. Literary historians have not come to terms with this period because we have lacked a theoretical vocabulary that could conceptualize a cultural integrity underlying such linguistic complexity. The literary tradition of the Norman age cannot be classified as Arabic, Latin, or Greek. It was an amalgam of the three traditions. And the symbolic and ritual vocabularies it drew upon were neither wholly Muslim nor wholly Christian. Until very recently, medieval literary scholarship had not developed a conceptual framework able to acknowledge and account for such complexities within a single, coherent literary tradition.

But scholars have, by now, become more attuned to the linguistic and cultural contingency of medieval textuality. Indeed, a survey of the dominant scholarship in the field has become impractical given the explosion of publications. Erich Auerbach's study of the crumbling of the cultural hegemony of Latin and the emergence of the vernaculars as the vehicles of intellectual life in western Europe served as a particularly provocative point of departure for the explorations of linguistic and literary indeterminacy in medieval textuality

in more recent scholarship. In the introduction to his study *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Auerbach pointed out that for some time the West had had little interest in the cultural history of the Middle Ages. The “primitive” cultures of medieval Europe seemed “not intelligible or even interesting.” But Auerbach heralded the emergence of a new attitude toward the Middle Ages: “Not only the scholars and critics among us, but also a large and steadily growing section of the general public, have ceased to be frightened by the diversity of peoples and epochs.”⁵

Auerbach’s statement seems, in retrospect, a bit optimistic. It took some time for scholars and critics, not to mention the general public, to warm to the diversity of the Middle Ages—its difference from us; its difference from what we have been trained to expect it to be; and finally its difference from itself, its scandalous variety. As Brian Stock pointed out in a penetrating reading of Auerbach’s place in the history of medieval studies, Auerbach opened the door for a radical comparatist approach to medieval literary history. But medieval studies as a discipline has, until quite recently, been reluctant to step through that door.⁶ Over the last two decades, however, a new conception of the linguistic and cultural contingency of medieval textuality has emerged. María Rosa Menocal in particular has made it impossible for scholars to ignore the scandal and variety peculiar to the Muslim-Christian borderlands of the northern Mediterranean. Menocal challenged the engrained scholarly habit of disavowing the intelligibility of Arabic and Islamic cultural discourse to a Christian public. In so doing, she gave us conceptual tools to track the shifts in readings of Arabic textuality witnessed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sicily.⁷ Menocal investigated the complexity of formations of cultural identity in al-Andalus; Suzanne Fleischman dismantled the unity of the most basic analytic element in the literary historian’s tool kit, *language*. She used the phrase “the myth of monoglossia” (borrowed from linguist Roy Harris) to refer to the tendency to assume that the written medieval vernaculars possessed a morphological unity, with a finite set of dialectical variants, but that faulty manuscript transmission has blurred its outlines.⁸ Language—that supreme human construction, whose internal coherence supports the coherence of all lesser human constructions—is itself multiple, Babelian by definition. The identity of a given language is constructed only through its difference from other languages, not by reference to a distinct ur-language and an originary (proto-national) cultural identity. This challenge to the unity of language (and, in Fleischman’s reading, to the unity of medieval textual language in particular) yields a language that is *different from itself*, not unified and unifying but fragmented and plural.

Some of the most intriguing new scholarship in medieval studies has

questioned the use of medieval literary history in the service of constructing a set of modern national identities. In a seminal article, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht inflected the readings of medieval alterity fundamental to both the “emergence of modern philologies” and the “Romantic idea of the nation” during the nineteenth century. Erich Auerbach himself—to complete the circle of medieval literary historians I have sketched—has proven a particularly provocative figure for scholars working on questions surrounding nation, culture, and the medieval origins of modern national cultures. Kathleen Davis uses Auerbach (or, more precisely, Benedict Anderson’s [mis]reading of Auerbach) as a point of departure for her discussion of the medieval notion of nationhood. She reads toward an understanding of nationalizing gestures in medievalist texts while working to “show . . . that the medieval difference from the modern cannot be set out in terms of an opposition.” That is, she understands a ninth-century English text to duplicate some of the strategies typical of modern nationalist narratives, while working to avoid an essentialist collapsing of the distinction between the “medieval” and the “modern.” And María Rosa Menocal reads Auerbach’s peripatetic life, his flight from Nazi Germany first to Istanbul and then to the United States, as one of the exilic narratives central to the philologists’ (and the medieval lyric poets’) shared histories.⁹ The finest medieval literary scholarship of the last two decades has painstakingly disassembled the linguistic, historical, and cultural structures that were built on the foundation of medieval literary traditions during the two preceding centuries—thus begging the question: What sensibilities and what urges might inform a *synthetic* moment following this analytic, self-reflective period in medieval studies?

The conditions attending the emergence of a textual culture in Norman Sicily make writing a literary history of that culture uniquely difficult. But to some extent, it would seem that this difficulty is constructed by the limits of our thinking about literary history: that a “national literature” ought to have a genetic affiliation to a “national language,” for instance. If a single culture (as Menocal demonstrates) admits a dialogue within itself between discrete cultures, if a single language (as Fleischman points out) encompasses a potential infinity of variants, the readings of Sicilian texts in this study present us with something contrary and complementary. In Sicilian textuality, most acutely in works produced during the Norman era, linguistic and cultural multiplicity is both deployed and disavowed; difference is simultaneously staged and annulled.

It would be a mistake to view the Kingdom of Sicily as a nation in the modern sense of the word, to ignore the differences between medieval Sicilian constructions of cultural identity and those that characterize modern,

Western nations. At the same time, the readings sketched below suggest that Sicily possessed the sort of cultural coherence—located along both geographic and temporal axes—that, in other medieval contexts, did generate a localized literary tradition. The difficulties raised by using the word *nation* in connection with medieval Sicily are manifest and thorny. But the strategy has its advantages. It provides a crucial instrument for conceptualizing the integrity of Sicilian literary history, and resisting the tendency to fragment it into constituent languages, following the boundaries of modern academic departments of *national* languages and literatures. “Language,” Patrick Geary wrote in a recent study on modern constructions of ethnicity and national identity, “apparently neither corresponded to nor determined culture” in the late antique and medieval world. And yet categories of ethnic and regional identity did exist, and medieval authors and rulers used these categories as means of “identifying themselves, distinguishing themselves from others, and mobilizing these identities for political purposes.”¹⁰ Recent scholarship has opened the way to a new understanding of medieval literary traditions by dismantling the anachronistic sensibilities imposed on medieval textuality by modern readings, and acknowledging its alterity and its cultural and linguistic contingency. A second critical movement must follow on the first, one that asks how medieval writers manipulated markers of cultural identity—languages, both vernacular and classical; textual practices borrowed from vernacular and classical literary traditions—in order to produce and deploy a geographical and temporal self-consciousness. This study of Sicilian literary history aims to contribute to our understanding of medieval vernacular textuality on both of these fronts.

During the twelfth century, Sicilian literature drew on multiple literary traditions. But during the thirteenth century, that linguistic complexity would be radically reduced. Arabic literary production in Sicily ceased, and Greek literacy became all but extinct. At the same time, Latin letters were consolidated, and poets began to write in Romance. The Kingdom of Sicily was refashioned as a Latinate Christian state, though echoes of the complexities of its cultural past remained. Contemporary Christian witnesses persisted in viewing Sicily as a state with a strong investment in Islamic culture and intimate links to the Arab world. Indeed the Sicilian monarchs, Frederick as well as his son Manfredi, did pursue relations with Muslim rulers and intellectuals outside Sicily. And they continued the Norman habit of importing Muslim culture—in particular, philosophical texts—and living in the large style of an “Oriental” monarch, with the appropriate trappings, not excluding a harem. The Sicilian poets used their love poems to demonstrate their ability to work with the new natural philosophy that reached the Christian world

through translations of Arabic texts made in Muslim-Christian borderlands such as al-Andalus and Sicily itself. And they performed a precisely calibrated operation of excision upon the Romance literary tradition they translated, paralleling the linguistic reduction the Sicilian state had recently negotiated.

The Sicilians' poetic innovations—and despite a persistent perception among literary historians that they were mere imitators of continental traditions, these were substantial—consist mainly of *limitations* of received poetic traditions. They wrote very little comic poetry, virtually no ethical poetry, and no panegyrics. They concentrated on love to the exclusion of all other topics, recasting the love poem as a vehicle for philosophical meditation. They wrote mainly *canzoni*, rejecting the more complex prosodic forms with which former generations of vernacular poets had experimented. Their texts seem to be written not for musical performance, but to be read without the accompaniment (or the distraction) of a musical setting. All of these modifications of the poetic tradition the Sicilians inherited would be accepted and affirmed by subsequent Italian poets. The Sicilians' chief *inventions* consisted of a new prosodic form—the sonnet—and a new literary language; both of these innovations would have decisive importance for subsequent literary history.

In this study, I will treat the literary history of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sicily as a tradition that—despite its discontinuities and inconsistencies—possessed a certain logic and coherence. I will use the shifting tension between discrete linguistic traditions, and in particular the relation between Arabic culture and Romance poetics, as an optic for rereading Sicilian literary history. In the next chapter, I will consider the aspect of Sicilian culture that Ibn Jubayr treated as one of the marvels of Sicily: Norman manipulation of Arabic cultural forms. Norman ventriloquism of Arabic culture created an obstacle for subsequent European historians, who could not read the hybrid texts produced in Norman Sicily for both pragmatic reasons and more complex cultural motives. A nineteenth-century Sicilian historian, Michele Amari, learned Arabic in order to exhume the history of the years of Muslim domination in Sicily. He also rescued the Arabic cultural production of the years of Norman rule from the occlusion to which it had been relegated, by virtue of European ignorance of the Arabic language and inability to entertain the possibility that a Christian state would promote literary production in Arabic. I use Amari's extraordinary career as an Orientalist, a Sicilian nationalist, and finally a proponent of Italian unification to situate my reading of the literary culture of the Norman age. Amari's activities both as scholar and as romantic nationalist demonstrate the effect that modern understandings of cultural and national identity have had on the legibility of medieval cultural constructions. In no field has the interface between modern present

and medieval past had a more dramatic impact than on our readings of cultural communications in the Muslim-Christian borderlands of the medieval Mediterranean.

In order to account for Sicily's transit from an Arabic-based literary culture to a Latinate culture, the literary historian must move across disciplinary boundaries and become a sort of *cultural historian of language*. She or he must look beyond the literary record to study constructions of cultural identity in extraliterary works. And the dynamic linguistic range of Sicilian literary life, as well as the tensions provoked by its linguistic plurality, require the literary historian to call into play texts written in the three languages of the kingdom. In Chapter 3, "Frederick II and the Genesis of a Sicilian Romance Culture," I use diplomatic sources and cultural and social history to evaluate the period of transition between the fall of the Norman dynasty and Frederick's reign, and the reconstitution of Sicilian culture as a Latinate culture under Frederick's rule. Frederick would deport the Muslims of Sicily to a ghetto city on the Italian mainland, even as he pursued diplomatic and cultural relations with prominent Arabs outside Sicily. The reformulation of Arabic culture as a "foreign" culture during the first half of the thirteenth century would be of decisive importance in the generation of a Latinate culture in Sicily.

Even after the collapse of Arabic literacy in Sicily, and the extinction of Arabic as a literary tongue, the culture of the Sicilian state retained the memory of the role that state had played as cultural mediator. Sicilian poets utilized Sicily's peculiar history—a past characterized by contact between the Muslim and Christian worlds—in the service of their literary ambition. They translated Sicilian history, and in particular the Sicilians' privileged access to the riches of Islamic culture, into a form that could serve them in the construction of a Romance vernacular culture that was at once a sophisticated response to continental literary history, and uniquely Sicilian. In Chapter 4, "Rereading *Le Origini*," I discuss the strategies that the Romance poets of thirteenth-century Sicily used—in particular, their manipulation of the language of natural philosophy—to situate themselves in relation to both mainland poetic conventions and the cultural history of their own state.

Literary historians tend to see Sicilian Romance poetry as an essentially derivative movement. The great poetic innovations, according to the traditional literary historical account, either preceded the Sicilians (the Occitan troubadours and the French epic poets) or followed them (the *dolce stil novo* movement of the late thirteenth century). The Sicilians' chief contribution to literary history, thus, was the invention of a new Italo-Romance literary language, and the translation of poetic conventions into this language. In Chapter 5, "Beyond *Le Origini*," I consider the poetry used by earlier generations

of literary historians as the register of a popular (and hence uniquely and indigenously Sicilian) voice: the poetry in the voice of a woman. These works, like all medieval poetry in a feminine voice, manipulate the power dynamic at the center of the erotic situation. By virtue of the popular voice they ventriloquize, and by virtue of their witty performance of power, the poems in the voice of a woman provide a fitting stage for reconsideration of the Sicilian corpus and the source and scope of Sicilian innovations.

A rereading of the works of the Romance poets of Sicily in the context of Sicilian cultural history can contribute substantially to our understanding of medieval cultural and literary formations in two discrete, but not unrelated, fields. The Sicilians wrote after the interventions of the first Romance poetic avant-gardes. Their response to those previous movements provides valuable insights concerning their understanding of their relation to literary history, and medieval vernacular poets' reading of the significance of *vernacularity* in general. The Romance vernacular poets of the Middle Ages wrote in opposition to literary history—to the Latin literary tradition. But they also wrote in communication and in contest with each other. None of the major Romance movements articulated its position in relation to preceding Romance poets in as sophisticated a way as the Sicilians did, for the simple reason that the Sicilians had more history to which to react. In the final chapter, "Vernacularity and Sicilian Culture," I consider the strategies that medieval literary historians and the medieval poets themselves used to situate vernacular poetics in relation to other literary traditions. The chronology of the Sicilian poets' activities makes them significant to the cultural history of the late Middle Ages in a second context as well. The Sicilians wrote during the age of Christian conquest of Muslim-occupied lands in southern Europe, a process that was reaching its final stages in Sicily during their lives. At the same time, Christian theologians and philosophers were working to absorb the treatises of the Islamic philosophers that had been translated over the course of the previous century. The evolution of relations between Arabic and Latinate culture in Sicily must be understood in the context of the Christian "reconquests" of the late Middle Ages, which occurred on these two fronts: the martial and the intellectual, territorial expansion accompanied by the acquisition and naturalization of Islamic culture.

One of the difficulties of working with medieval Sicilian literary history—the same is true, although to a lesser extent, of medieval European literary history in general—is the inaccessibility of the sources necessary for studying that history. The poetic works, as well as the subsidiary sources that illuminate the cultural background to the literary history, can be difficult to locate and, once located, difficult to read. In the "Texts in Translation" that

follows this study, I have gathered and translated some of the most important and most intriguing documents used in the body of the book—poetry, letters, histories, and scientific translations—from the Arabic, Latin, Old French, and Siculo-Romance, in the hopes of demystifying in a small way Sicily's occluded and obscure cultural history.

The narrative that emerges from the consideration of Sicilian literary history in this study does not suggest a genetic influence between Arabic and Romance poetics in Sicily. That is, Sicilian literary history does not support the so-called Arabic thesis, the proposition that Arabic poetics had a direct impact on emergent Romance poetry—or vice versa, that Romance poets influenced the Arabs. This does not mean that the Arabic thesis is wrong. Compelling evidence has emerged to support many of its proponents' suppositions in the Andalusian context. In one of the most intriguing texts to have surfaced in recent scholarship on Andalusian vernacular poetics, for instance, the Jewish theologian Maimonides inveighs against the singing of *muwashshahat*—a popular Andalusian song form that typically included vernacular refrains—in Hebrew: “If there are two *muwashshahas* on the same subject, namely one that arouses and praises the instinct of lust, and encourages the soul to practice it; and if one of these two *muwashshahas* is in Hebrew, and the other is either in Arabic or in Romance—why then, listening to and uttering the one in Hebrew is the most reprehensible thing one can do in the eyes of the Holy Law, because of the excellence of the Hebrew language. For it is not appropriate to employ Hebrew in what is not excellent”¹¹ This comment demonstrates that *muwashshahat* were performed by the three linguistic communities in al-Andalus. Furthermore, it suggests that to a contemporary observer, a *muwashshaha* was a *muwashshaha*, no matter what language was used to sing it. Thus the statement demonstrates an identity between popular songs sung in the three languages.

Such evidence does not exist in the Sicilian context, which does not militate against the Arabic thesis. It simply suggests that Sicily and al-Andalus are not identical cases. Muslim domination did not last as long in Sicily as it did in al-Andalus, and the Norman conquest of the island began before the Muslim state in Sicily reached cultural maturity. Furthermore, the period of cohabitation in Sicily was much briefer, and so the culture of cohabitation did not develop as fully as it did in al-Andalus. Some of the texts that will be considered in the next chapter are characterized by an extraordinary cultural hybridity. If Sicilian history had allowed it, this protean culture of exchange might eventually have produced a hybrid poetic form like the *muwashshaha* in Sicily.¹² But cultural exchange in Sicily, to the extent that we understand it today, tended to take the form of monarchic patronage of Arab men of letters

and architects during the Norman age, and Christian appropriation of Muslim culture during the thirteenth century. Thus, for instance, this record of a performance by Arab singing girls at the court of Frederick II: “Two beautiful Saracen girls, who balanced atop two balls placed on the ground, sang while the rolling balls carried them back and forth, playing cymbals with their hands, and moving and bending their bodies in time with the music.”¹³ This reference to the presence of Arab singing girls at the Sicilian court, tantalizing though it is, gives us no reason to believe that Arab song forms were transferred to Sicily. We would need positive evidence of a more general diffusion, like that provided in the Andalusian context by Maimonides, to establish that Arabic culture was more generally known in Sicily. But this account does demonstrate the ongoing presence of Arabic culture, and an exposure to it at least at the highest levels of Sicilian society. And, of course, new evidence may emerge to change our perception of the penetration of Arabic cultural forms in thirteenth-century Sicily.

Sicily, like al-Andalus, teaches us not to oversimplify the history of cultural relations between Muslims and Christians in the borderland states of the medieval Mediterranean. The transition from Arabic cultural dominance to Latin hegemony in Sicily was achieved by means of an intricate series of negotiations between two cultures, communications and competitions that were always antagonistic but never simply oppositional. But unlike al-Andalus, Sicily gives us a breathtakingly swift synopsis of the drama of serial conquest in the northern Mediterranean. Al-Andalus does not provide the literary historian with this kind of compressed, dynamic movement; the events of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Sicily mirror and foreshadow events that began simultaneously but would take two more centuries to unfold on the Iberian peninsula. The Christian “reconquest” of southern Europe was first staged in Sicily, and its central theme—a tension between the naturalization of Muslim culture and the containment or expulsion of Muslim citizens—was first rehearsed there. In Sicily, however, the process of cultural and economic appropriation was telescoped into a brief historical moment. And the complex psychological drama that informed that process on a human level—the tension between desire and fear of the other, between ambition and the anxiety of influence—was condensed into three generations of a single dynasty. The saga of Christian conquest that in Spain—with its sprawling millennial history, and its huge cast of literary giants, journeymen, and curiosities—was something of an epic, in Sicily was played out as tragic opera.

* * *

Note on the transliteration of Arabic words: I have followed the convention of transliterating letters from the Arabic *without* diacriticals. Those who read Arabic will recognize the words without these aids, while those who do not will only be distracted by them.

2. An Archeology of the Sicilian Park

Ma gli arabisti non sono i soli ai quali occorra di scrivere e leggere parole arabiche e perciò . . . (But Arabists are not the only ones who need to write and to read Arabic words, and so . . .)

—Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, I: 36

FOR A LONG TIME, no one remembered who had built the pleasure palaces of Norman Sicily. The syncretic culture of the era had faded from memory, and neither scholars nor the general public had reason to believe that the buildings, with their “Oriental” architectural motifs and their calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic, had been produced at the command of Christian monarchs from northern Europe. Some Norman monumental architecture, of course, announced its provenance unmistakably, despite its use of Arabic inscriptions and architectural conventions: the palace complex in Palermo; the churches in Palermo and Monreale and Cefalù. But by the nineteenth century, Sicilians read the Normans’ pleasure palaces as remnants of the years of Muslim occupation in Sicily. Indeed, the palaces held a place of honor in the Sicilian imagination as the only remaining monuments to Sicily’s centuries as an Arab state. It was Michele Amari (1806–89), Sicilian patriot, Italian revolutionary, and pioneering historian of Muslim Sicily, who read the inscriptions and determined that the buildings were constructed not by the Muslim emirs of Sicily, but at the order of the Norman monarchs. In exile in Paris—where he fled in 1842, when he ran afoul of the Bourbon regime that ruled Sicily—Amari, working from rubbings, translated the Arabic inscriptions on two Sicilian palaces (the Cuba and La Zisa) and demonstrated that the buildings were dedicated not to Muslim emirs but to Norman kings.¹

The history of the unraveling of the history of Muslim Sicily and Norman Sicily—the story of the excavation of those centuries dense with event and cultural complexity—is curiously fraught with tales of mistranslation, mistaken identity and outright counterfeit. The years of Muslim domination in Sicily had been all but forgotten when, toward the end of the eighteenth century, a Maltese cleric living in Sicily, Giuseppe Vella (1740–1814), produced documents purporting to be Arabic letters written by the rulers of Norman Sicily and Muslim North Africa (the *Consiglio di Sicilia* and the *Consiglio d’Egitto*). Vella’s remarkable discoveries found a ready audience among Sicilians, and his translations of these manuscripts brought him into contact with the highest levels of Sicilian society. He became a familiar figure in Palermo’s most exclusive social circles, and a favorite of the Bourbon government. In time, it was discovered that the manuscripts were fakes. Vella himself, despite

a very thin knowledge of the Arabic language, had manufactured the texts and concocted fanciful Italian translations of them.²

But his “minsogna saracina” (the “Saracen lie,” as contemporary Sicilian poet Giovanni Meli termed it³) had a fortuitous impact on Arabic studies in Sicily. The effort to unmask Vella and expose his manuscripts as counterfeits, and to replace his inventions with fact, gave impetus to the first generation of Sicilian Arabists. Rosario Gregorio (1753–1809), a Sicilian historian, in an act of linguistic and scholarly self-invention that rivaled Amari’s own subsequent metamorphosis into an Arabist, taught himself Arabic in order to refute Vella. Gregorio would be Sicily’s greatest Arabist until Amari arrived on the scene, and would produce, in response to Vella’s pseudo-Arabic fabulations, a collection of Arabic texts of use to scholars of Sicilian history—the *Rerum Arabicarum, Quae ad Historiam Siculam Spectant, Ampla Collectio* (1790).⁴

Amari belongs to the next generation of Sicilian Arabists. His erudition and his ability to work with the Arabic manuscript sources—all the more striking for the fact that he did not undertake the study of Arabic until the age of 36—distinguished him from his forebears, and indeed from many of those who have come after him. His major work on Muslim Sicily, the *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, remains the standard reference for scholars. And yet Amari seemed to have come to his specialization almost by accident. As a young man, Amari trained as a revolutionary warrior in order to fight for the cause of Sicilian independence. Only when that intention was frustrated did he produce his first work as a historian: a study of the 1282 uprising known as the Sicilian Vespers, whose thinly concealed political overtones provoked the Bourbon government and drove Amari into exile in Paris. He would turn to the study of Muslim Sicily, finally, when his Parisian exile gave him access to Arabic tutors and collections of Arabic manuscripts.

Amari was initially attracted to Sicily’s history as an Arab state as a necessary backdrop for understanding the *Norman* period. In the closing sentences of his 2,200-page work on Muslim Sicily, he would write, “I complete in a united and free country a work which I first undertook in exile, thirty years ago, moved by an irresistible desire to look into the shadows that shroud the history of Sicily *before the Normans*” (emphasis added).⁵ Amari began his intellectual career (like most Sicilian intellectuals of his era) as a Sicilian separatist. Norman Sicily held an obvious appeal for him, as an age when the island functioned as the seat of a powerful and autonomous kingdom. However, unlike most of his Sicilian contemporaries, Amari would spend most of his life outside Sicily, and an international community of exiled revolutionaries and political theorists in Paris would transform his political views. His Parisian exile would convert Amari to the project of Italian unification.

But the years of Norman domination in Sicily remained for him a potent symbol of the dream of Sicilian autonomy, even after he had abandoned that dream as impractical.

Of course, the Normans did not generate that most vital evidence of cultural autonomy: a vernacular culture. Sicilians did not use any of the colloquial tongues spoken in Sicily as a vehicle for cultural production until the era of Frederick II, a generation after the death of the last full-blooded Norman monarch, when Sicilian poets began to compose in the Romance vernacular spoken in the kingdom. Rather, Normans expressed vernacularity through (linguistic and literary) complexity. The three major linguistic and literary cultures of the medieval Mediterranean—Arabic, Greek, and Latin—converged in Norman Sicily. The Norman state did not impose a linguistic hegemony on this complexity (as contemporary Norman conquerors did in Britain). Rather, it encouraged production in each tradition, imposing a rough division of literary labor upon the three languages.

In the most remarkable texts of the Norman era, the diverse linguistic and literary traditions present in Sicily were used to mediate each other, creating a fluid hybrid textuality. That is, Norman Sicily saw two different kinds of textual production: monolingualistic texts that located themselves within the context of conservative mainland linguistic and literary traditions, and multilingual texts. Hybrid texts were not the norm. Produced generally under the direct authority of the Norman monarchs themselves, they functioned as a kind of showcase cultural production, demonstrating in cultural terms the economic and military reach of the Norman state.

Despite the Norman regime's ongoing economic and social repression of the state's Muslim residents, Arabic had pride of place in Sicily's complex literary-linguistic terrain. Throughout the era of Norman domination, Arabic remained the premier language of literary production. Sicilians wrote poetry, including the poetic inscriptions in the Norman palaces, in Arabic rather than in the tongues of Mediterranean Christendom. And the linguistically compound works produced in Norman Sicily gave precedence to Arabic. In fact, Arabic cultural production increased in sophistication, paradoxically, as the subjugation of Muslim Sicilians increased.

The predominance of Arabic in Norman cultural production (along with the hybridity of that production) rendered some aspects of Norman culture illegible for centuries. Sicilians read the Norman monuments as remnants of the years of Muslim rule until Amari exposed them as Norman ventriloquism of Arab architectural conventions. The poetry of the Norman era fell off the map, ignored by Arab and Western scholars alike, until Amari culled and collated it from medieval anthologies.

The distance between the Muslim and Christian worlds from the close of the Middle Ages until the early modern period accounts for this illegibility. A new era of colonial contacts between Europe and the Muslim states of the Mediterranean—this time, not Arab colonization of the northern Mediterranean, but rather European colonial expansion into the southern and eastern Mediterranean—brought the two worlds into closer contact, and Europeans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (like the Normans of the twelfth century) thus came into possession of the knowledge of Arabic language and literature. Michele Amari was one of the beneficiaries of this renaissance of Arabic learning in Europe, and a confluence of personal history (Amari's Arabic erudition, acquired so fortuitously and so late in life) and political history (a perception of the increased relevance of the Muslim world to the West) made it possible for him to read the monuments and texts that had lain forgotten for so long.

Amari—one of the most heroic intellectuals of an era that produced many; the *Lessico universale italiano* calls him “una delle figure del Risorgimento di più ricca e intera umanità”⁶—would piece together the history of the years of Muslim domination in Sicily by poring over manuscripts in the libraries of Paris and London and Leiden, manuscripts that no one had read in half a millennium. In the closing years of his life, he would worry that his effort had been wasted: “I have consecrated thirty years of work to this imperceptible atom of history. Behold, a shooting star that will be extinguished in a few years, without even having twinkled, and without being noticed save by a few curious bookworms!”⁷ But the historical developments of the last 150 years have only enhanced the relevance of his work as Orientalist. Amari's intellectual and political pursuits converged in the Christian Kingdom of Sicily. His work on the culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries demonstrated, in particular, the centrality of Arabic culture in the Kingdom of Sicily, and the pressing need to account for the Normans' use of the Arabic language and Islamic cultural institutions in our readings of the cultural production of the era.

* * *

“No one has lived in Sicily who has not talked about it. . . .”
—*Al-Umari, “Masalik al-Absar”*⁸

In his account of his visit to Sicily in 1184, Ibn Jubayr reported that the Norman monarch's “palaces are arranged [around Palermo] like necklaces around the throats of shapely women, and the monarch moves among these gardens



Figure 1. La Cubula, Palermo. This small structure once stood in a Norman park, part of a palace complex that included the larger Cuba. Now apartment buildings surround it; one of them can be glimpsed behind the dome. (Author's photo)

and piazzas, seeking sport and amusement.”⁹ The Normans’ palaces and parklands and the use the monarchs made of them were the subject of much comment, described by a number of visitors to the island. Some of these constructions, such as Favara and perhaps La Zisa, were remnants of the years of Arab rule, redeveloped and renovated by the Normans. The Normans themselves adopted an Arabicizing style when they created others—the Cuba and the Cubula (fig. 1), for instance. The extramural palaces were sumptuous refuges situated in hunting and fishing preserves, to which the monarch and his guests would retire after a day of sport. The extramural parklands described by Ibn Jubayr, with their hunting and fishing preserves and their pleasure palaces, allowed the Norman monarch to live in a sort of Oriental splendor. The visitors to Sicily who wrote descriptions of the Normans’ parklands and palaces obligingly recorded both the natural riches of the island and the lavish life-style of the Sicilian monarchs—which the parklands and palaces, after all, were intended to celebrate and advertise.

The Normans built their pleasure palaces in an Arabicizing style. Like Arabic architecture designed for the same purpose, the Norman palaces typically incorporated water as a central design element. In a hot and dry climate, water seduces all the senses, and the well-designed medieval Islamic palace used water to delight not only the eyes, but also the ears, the nose, the skin, and the tongue. Reflecting pools surrounded the Cuba and La Zisa. La Zisa also had internal fountains (fig. 2). And the Favara complex satisfied the monarchs’ sporting appetites with pools stocked for fishing. Also like similar Arabic buildings, the Norman pleasure palaces were belvederes designed to take advantage of spectacular views. The inscriptions in La Zisa (like, for instance the inscriptions in the Alhambra in Cordoba) made reference to the views, speaking in the voice of the building itself to guide the visitor in the correct reading of the view he will enjoy—a perspective that illuminates the power of the monarch who possesses the surrounding land and whose taste and wealth are demonstrated by the building itself. “Whenever you wish,” La Zisa informs the visitor, “you may behold the finest kingdom, the most exalted realm of the world . . . (and its king) in a splendid palace, one which merits haughtiness and delight.”¹⁰

Within the city walls, the Normans’ royal complex represents their architectural ambitions most strikingly. The Norman palace survives, including the palatine chapel, remarkable for its aggressive synthesis of Islamic and Christian architectural motifs. The mosaic decorations in the chapel and in Roger II’s apartment incorporate Byzantine imagery and Islamic design elements in an elegant and powerful fusion. The ceiling of the chapel, in particular, has become symbolic of the Normans’ capable manipulation of the

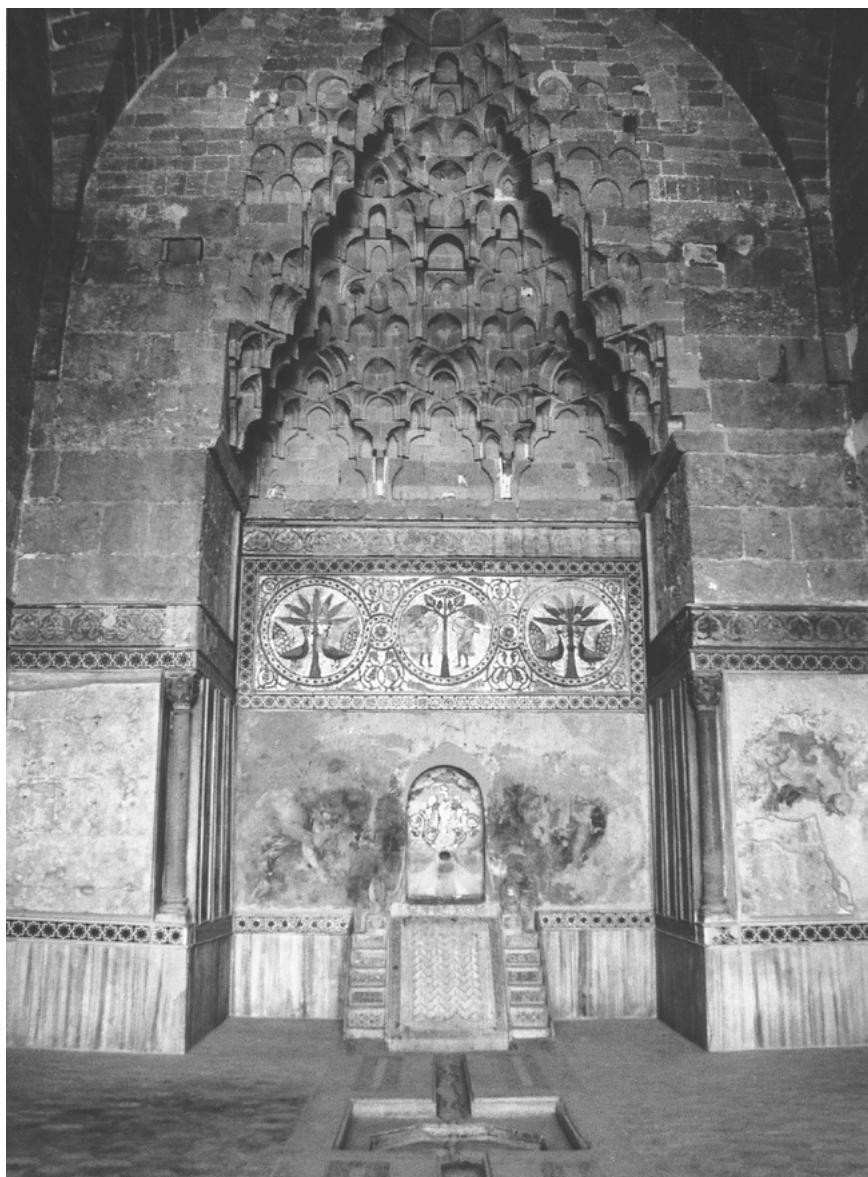


Figure 2. La Zisa, Palermo. In the interior of the palace, water circulated through an internal cooling system, then ran from the internal piping over the slanted “washboard” into the watercourse at the bottom of the photograph, and thence out into the reflecting pool at the front of the building. The palm tree mosaics and the *muqarnas* ceiling above them are typical of Norman palaces. (Author's photo)

vocabulary of Islamic architectural embellishment. Its *muqarnas* extrusions—rounded protuberances jutting from the ceiling—are inscribed with Arabic words meant to signify either the strength of the monarch or the power of the Lord (or, more likely, intended to suggest both at once). Staale Sinding-Larsen speculates that the words chosen—“victory and perfection and perfection and ability and power . . . and riches and acquisition and victory and power,” to give a typical series—were “derived from theological and moralistic discourse.” And Jeremy Johns terms them “almost a litany of the power of the king.” The palatine chapel mediates between the sacred and the profane, the Islamic and the Christian, the Arabic and Greek tongues, and creates out of the fusion of these voices a stunning compound textuality.¹¹

The Norman architecture of Sicily represents some of the gems of medieval architecture, outstanding not only for the quality of the constructions, but also for the hybrid vocabulary that it uses with a convincing fluency. It demonstrates the methodology by which the Normans who occupied Sicily created a cultural idiom for their state: not by transposing native cultural forms to a new geographical setting, but by adopting, adapting, and augmenting the cultural vocabulary of the island they had occupied. The Normans absorbed the cultural idiom of Muslim Sicily (and, to a lesser but still considerable extent, of the Byzantine East). Nor was their project essentially conservative, as their willingness to embrace the Arab culture of Sicily’s past might suggest. On the contrary, in certain cases the Muslim rulers of Sicily had not utilized the Islamic practices evidenced in Norman Sicily. Rather, they represent cultural developments that emerged in the Muslim world after the fall of Muslim Sicily, imported to Sicily by the state’s Christian rulers. Thus, for instance, the Norman monarchs’ *‘alamat*, or honorific titles used on coins and in documents. Neither the mints nor the chancelleries of Muslim Sicily seem to have used *‘alamat*. It appears that the Norman monarchs borrowed the practice from contemporary Muslim states, copying in particular the style of the Fatimid rulers of North Africa and Egypt.¹²

This fact helps us to read the Normans’ reading of their own cultural environment. The Normans used Sicily’s historical connection to the Muslim world, and the continuing presence of Arabs in Sicily, in order to pursue a fluency in Arab cultural forms. Though Norman Sicily was unmistakably a Christian kingdom, and its monarch a Christian prince, Islamic-Christian hybridity characterized its cultural vocabulary. The Normans used a compound cultural language—made up, among other elements, of architectural and decorative practices imported from the Muslim and Byzantine cultural systems that dominated in the eastern Mediterranean—to represent their kingdom and its extraordinary wealth and power. And they seemed to privilege

Arabic among the languages they used, perceiving it as a prestigious language in the cultural sphere, and as a valuable language of diplomacy and commerce in the political and economic spheres. The dense condensation of signifying systems that typified Norman cultural production was rendered illegible after the dynasty that produced it faded from memory. Thus historians read the Normans' palaces as remnants of a more straightforward cultural system—as Arab constructions, not the products of Norman appropriation of Arab cultural practice.

I have chosen the palaces of Norman Sicily as a way to introduce the lithe syntheses of the culture of the period in part because they represent the most visceral remnant of Norman Sicily. But the Normans' pleasure palaces left evocative traces in the contemporary historical and literary record, as well as in the Sicilian landscape. The Norman monuments were much talked about by both Sicilians and visitors to Sicily. Thus, for instance, Favara, during the Norman era a splendid fishing preserve with a pleasure palace, is remembered today not primarily as an *architectural* monument (the palace does not survive) but as a *textual* monument. Contemporary visitors celebrated the monarch's retreat at Favara (the name comes from the Arabic *fawwara*, meaning natural fresh-water spring). Their records of it give evidence of the image that the Norman rulers liked to present of themselves: monarchs of the Christian West who commanded a wealth and possessed a refinement matched only by contemporary Islamic rulers.

Romualdo Salernitano, a priest from a prominent Sicilian family who was close to Roger's son and grandson, William I and William II, tells us that at Favara, Roger II created a well-stocked pool for game fishing and built a palace near it. He constructed a walled hunting preserve nearby, stocked it with deer and boars, and built another palace there. And "it was the custom of this man—wise and discerning in his pleasures—to use this park as the quality of the season demanded. In the winter and during Lent he stayed in the palace at Favara, for the sake of the abundance of fish; and he weathered the oppression of summer heat at the park, and relieved his spirit of the fatigue of many cares and worries by hunting, in moderation."¹³ Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler who visited Sicily in the late twelfth century, reported that the Norman monarch's extramural parklands contained "all sorts of fruit trees as also a great spring surrounded by a wall and a reservoir called al-Behira [the word that Benjamin uses is Arabic for "pool"; presumably, he refers to Favara], in which abundance of fish are preserved. The king's vessels are ornamented with silver and gold and ever ready for the amusement of himself and his women."¹⁴

But a poet known as al-Attrabanishi (the name means "from Trapani")

left the most memorable account of the garden and palace at Favara, a lovely description evoking the beauty and splendor of Sicily and the power of the Sicilian monarch that has been termed by one modern scholar “practically the symbol of Muslim Sicily”¹⁵—despite the fact that it is a product of a Sicily under Norman, not Muslim, rule. Apparently a fragment from a longer *qasida* written in praise of Roger II, the poem is recorded in the poetic anthology collected by ‘Imad al-Din. Because the great anthology of Sicilian poetry, made by Ibn al-Qatta‘, has been lost, ‘Imad al-Din’s collection represents our chief source for the Arabic poetry of Sicily. For the poetry of the Norman era it is a difficult source, however, because ‘Imad al-Din has a tendency to cut short panegyrics dedicated to the Norman monarch, protesting that he will not record lines written in praise of the infidels. Introducing the fragment of al-Attabanishi’s poem, however, ‘Imad al-Din pays an oblique compliment to the Norman monarch. “I will give an excerpt from the poet’s description of the park *of the mighty one*,” he tells us. The adjective that he uses to describe the proprietor of the park—“the mighty one,” *al-mu’tazz-iyā*—makes reference to Roger II’s *‘alama*, the Arabic honorific title that he used on his coinage and in his correspondence. Roger identified himself as “*al-mu’tazz bi-llah*,” or “he who glories in the power of God.” ‘Imad al-Din’s meaning would be clear to the literate reader of the era, who would be able to decipher his dense prose, recognize the *‘alama* of the infidel ruler of Sicily, and thus determine the park’s provenance.¹⁶

“Oh Favara of the two seas!” the poet sings, “in you, desires converge! . . . It is as if your waters, where they flow together, in their clarity were melted pearls, and the land were dusky skin. . . .”¹⁷ The poets’ twinned seas are matched by two palm trees, “like two lovers who choose as protection from the enemy, a castle well-fortified against them.” Scholars have read the doubling of the sea and the palm tree as a realistic representation of the park. Possibly, Favara originally had two pools stocked with game fish, and there may have been two palm trees nearby.¹⁸ But the images seem almost certainly a poetic elaboration. The doubled garden is Qur’anic; the *surat al-Rahman* describes paradise as a doubled garden, using dual nouns and verbs to catalogue its delights. And the doubling of the palm tree allows a departure into the language of love poetry, so that the poet is writing not only a description of a magnificent park created by a powerful monarch, but also a love poem. At its climax (or at the climax of the excerpt given us by ‘Imad al-Din), the poem embraces all the people of Sicily—whom it apostrophizes as *ahl al-hawa*, the “people of love,” a common turn of phrase in Arabic love poems—in its scope. The fragment of the poem that we possess concludes with a prayer for the two palm trees:

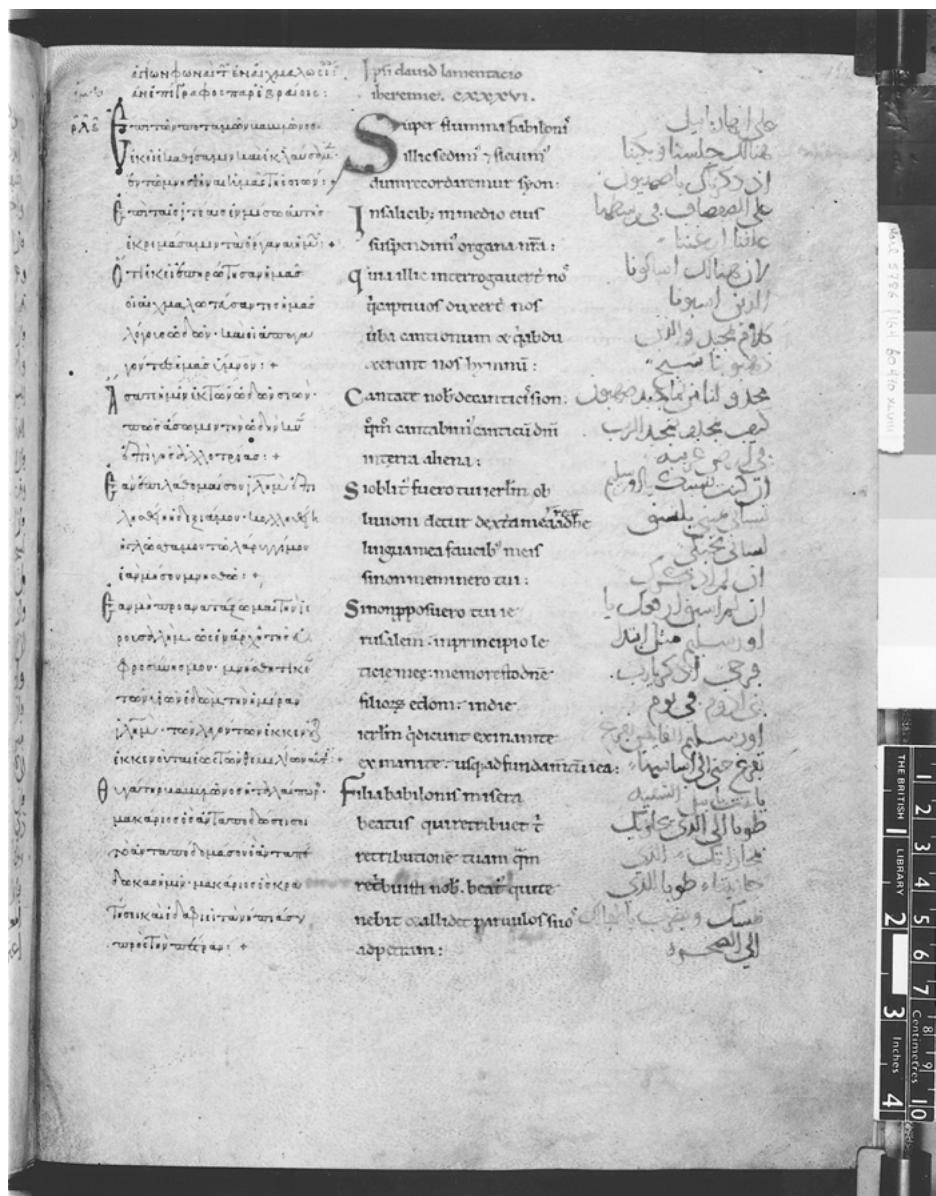
Oh two palms of the two seas of Palermo, may you always drink
of the sustaining rain! May it not be cut off!

May you take pleasure in the passage of time, may it grant all your desires,
and may history lull you to sleep.

By God, protect with your shade the people of love,
for in the safety of your shade love finds protection!¹⁹

Sicilian history would not honor al-Attrabanishi's prayer. The century following Roger's reign was not the sort that would lull lovers to sleep. It is pleasant to believe that al-Attrabanishi chose to fill his poem with doubled imagery in part to symbolize the dualism of Sicily's Muslim and Christian population. Certainly, the "people of love" for whose protection the poet ardently prays refers to the Sicilian community as a whole—or, more precisely, to the Sicilian community as it was represented, in a rarefied and idealized form, at the Norman court. This fragment of a poem has become the anthem of Sicily's recovered Arab history—"practically the symbol of Muslim Sicily"—in part because of its delicate beauty (it is compact and exquisite, like a miniature portrait), and in part because of its pacific portrait of a Sicilian people. The delicate unity government constructed by the Normans would not endure long, and was always accompanied by a certain amount of oppression of Muslim Sicilians. This oppression increased during the years of Norman rule in Sicily, even as the importation of Muslim culture and its manipulation by the Norman monarchs also, paradoxically, increased. The image of the Sicilian "people of love" is based on reality, but at the same time is a poetic confection, as much like the real world as the hunting and fishing preserves of the extramural parklands.

The most striking cultural productions of Norman Sicily (and hence the best known to the modern world) are these works constructed of a vertiginous combination of the discrete cultures of the island's residents: an Arab poet drawing on Qur'anic imagery in a panegyric that praises a Christian ruler; a palace chapel that integrates Islamic and Byzantine vocabulary to represent the power, at once secular and divine, of the monarch. It must be stressed, however, that the *literary* culture of Sicily during the Norman era does not echo this hybridity. Nor is it likely that it would. For purely practical purposes, it is to the advantage of the literary author to choose a language (and the literary tradition that it supports) and stick to it. Thus, the cultural production of the Norman era fell into two main groups. Literary works produced in a single mainland language—Arabic, Greek, or Latin—adhered conservatively to a mainland literary tradition. Extra-literary works, synthetic in their linguistic



formation, were generated by translation among the three great linguistico-literary traditions represented on the island (a substantially smaller category, including the architectural epigraphy discussed above, as well as works like the trilingual psalter currently in the British Library collection [fig. 3], or funerary epigraphy).²⁰ Furthermore, those literary works written in Arabic, Greek, or Latin seem to observe a rough division of labor. The Normans seem to have perceived Arabic to be a prestige language. It was the language of poetry. And two of the most ambitious literary works produced in Norman Sicily—al-Idrisi's geography and Ibn Zafar's philosophical advice to princes (if in fact Ibn Zafar wrote this text while in residence in Sicily)—were written in Arabic. Greek was used for liturgical texts; and Greek Sicilians participated in the translation of scientific works, though these were typically translated into Latin. Latin was used for histories and for scientific works.

During the Norman era, Arab poets wrote works both in support of the Norman dynasty and in opposition to it. The most eloquent voice of opposition belonged to Ibn Hamdis. Sicily's most prominent poet and one of the greatest Arab poets of the Middle Ages, Ibn Hamdis was born after the Norman conquest had already begun. He left as a young man, in 1078/79. His magnificent poems about Sicily, known as the *Siqilliyat*, are imbued with the exile's tender nostalgia and bitterness. The Normans are constantly present in these elegies as the heartless conquerors who have separated him from a beloved homeland. And at times, the poet turns even against Sicily itself, doubting his homeland as if it were a faithless lover:

I believed that my land would return to her people—
but my beliefs have become a torment to me; I have grown hopeless

I console my soul, since I see my land
fighting a losing battle against a venomous enemy

What else, when she has been shamed, when the hands
of the Christians have turned her mosques into churches²¹

Other Norman-era poets ('Abd al-Halim, Abu Musa) wrote invective against the Normans apparently without ever leaving Sicily. "Ardently did I love Sicily as a young man," wrote 'Abd al-Halim, "and it was like a corner of the garden of eternity; but it was not ordained that I should live to middle age before it became a burning hell."²² These anti-Norman *qasidas* (or odes) give voice to the terrible defeat that Muslim Sicilians suffered at the Normans' hands and to the attachment that Muslim Sicilians felt to their homeland before its loss.

But other Arab poets—such as al-Atrabanishi, author of the poem in praise of Favara and its lord, Roger II—stayed in Sicily following the transition of power and transferred their allegiance to the Norman rulers. ‘Imad al-Din gives us an excerpt from another such poet, al-Buthayri, which he cuts short with a curt dismissal: “I limit myself to the two *qasidas* which I have cited, because they are in praise of the infidels, as has been demonstrated.”²³ Abu al-Daw’ (who may have been a visitor to Sicily, rather than a Sicilian native) wrote an elegy on the death of Roger II’s son.²⁴ Ibn Qalaqis, an Alexandrian, visited Palermo in 1168 and wrote verses in honor of William II, as well as a poetic record of his journey to Sicily. Historians cite Ibn Qalaqis’s relationship with William as evidence of the increase in interest in Islamic culture, accompanied by a paradoxical increase in oppression of Muslim Sicilians. William’s reign witnessed an intensification of anti-Muslim governmental policy and Christian uprisings against Arabs in Sicily.

Some Arabs traveled from other parts of the Arab world to Sicily and there, under the patronage of the Norman rulers, produced important works. Toward the end of the eleventh century, a scholar known as Constantine the African arrived at the monastery at Montecassino, where he worked on numerous translations of scientific texts from Arabic to Latin, including some important medical texts. According to some sources, the prominent writer Ibn Zafar was born in Sicily in 1104. He was raised in Mecca, however, and returned to Sicily only as an adult. We do not know whether he was living in Sicily when he wrote his “mirror for princes,” the *Sulwan al-Muta’*. Al-Idrisi was born in Ceuta, in present-day Morocco. It was at Roger II’s court, however, that he produced his great work, one of the most ambitious and accurate geographies of the Middle Ages. We are told that al-Idrisi interviewed the travelers who arrived in Sicily for information concerning the lands they had visited. Based on these interviews, a globe was constructed from precious metals. Al-Idrisi wrote his geography as an explanatory text to accompany this globe. So, like al-Atrabanishi’s poetic evocation of Favara, al-Idrisi’s text gives a literary testimony to a physical construction of which no trace survives.²⁵

In Greek, Sicilians produced liturgical texts (some ninety homilies written by Roger II’s official homilist, Theophanes Kerameus, survive) and hagiographic works (for instance, the “History of the Five Patriarchs” by Neilos Doxopatrios). A small amount of Greek poetry from the Norman era survives. The emir Eugenius, William I’s financial administrator, composed devotional poetry as well as a plaintive lament from prison, where he landed when he fell under suspicion of treason against the Hohenstaufen emperor Henry VI in 1194: “You, my books, writings on every subject—come to me!

Welcome me, bring comfort to the faint of heart, with the sweetness of your company. . . .”²⁶ Evelyn Jamison points out that Eugenius seems not quite devastated by his imprisonment; he seems rather to relish the freedom from the rigors and uncertainties of the political life, and to prefer the more tranquil company of his books.²⁷ Greek Sicilians also produced translations. The same Eugenius translated Ptolemy’s *Optics* from an Arabic version into Latin. And Henricus Aristippus, archdeacon of Catania and head of William I’s chancellery, was responsible for the translation of a number of philosophical works—including Plato’s *Meno* and *Phaedo*—from Greek into Latin. He dedicates his version of the *Phaedo* to a friend who was, as Henricus translated, preparing to return to England. “Whither do you hurry,” Henricus asks him, “to what home do you prepare to return? To the learned man any land is a homeland. . . .” And Henricus lists the intellectual riches that his friend will leave behind in Sicily: the libraries of Syracuse and Argolica, whose holdings include scientific works by Euclid, Aristotle, Anaxagoros, Themistius, and Plutarch; and a ruler known as much for his intellectual zeal as for his military strength. Nonetheless, if the friend chooses to leave Sicily and its riches, Henricus will send him on his way with this text in his hand: “as solace on your long journey, take Plato’s *Phaedo*, on the immortality of the soul, translated from Argive into Italianate words, which I began on the battlefield while the estimable king besieged the city of Benevento, and completed in Palermo.”²⁸

The most remarkable Latin texts produced during the years of Norman domination in Sicily are the histories recording the Normans’ activities there. Other sorts of texts were composed in Latin—the “Regimen sanitatis,” for instance, a medical textbook compiled in Salerno at the beginning of the twelfth century; and the dramatic and moral works written by William of Blois (Peter’s brother) while he lived in Sicily. On the subject of the deeds of the Normans, however, Sicilian writers truly extended themselves. They wrote verse epics. Peter of Eboli’s *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, celebrating the ascension of the Hohenstaufen line to the Sicilian throne, commences with praise for the Norman conquerors of the Sicilian kingdom. On the passing of the last full-blooded Norman ruler, William II, Peter tells us, all the residents of Palermo—that “urbs felix, populo dotata trilingui” (“fortunate city, endowed with a trilingual population”), in the epic’s most famous line—mourned together. And the only extant manuscript of Peter’s work gives us the most memorable visual image we possess of intellectual life during the Norman age, an illustration depicting the Norman chancellery, with its Greek, Saracen, and Latin notaries.²⁹ Sicilians of the Norman era also left pragmatic histories of less lofty literary ambition: Alexander Telesinus’s *Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie Calabrie atque Apulie*, for instance, a text so modest that it terms

itself a “*libellum*” (a century and a half before Dante’s *libello*). And Geoffrey Malaterra tells us at the beginning of his historical work that, though he might have jazzed up his history with rhetorical fireworks, the monarch (in this case, Roger II) specifically requested him to write simply so that all might understand his words—couching this disclaimer, of course, in the floweriest language he could muster.³⁰ “Hugo Falcandus”—or more precisely the author known by that name who penned another such history (the *Liber de regno Sicilie*)—apparently also authored an anonymous defense of the Norman dynasty, written during the days when it seemed that Sicilians might be able to prevent the German ruler Henry VI from seizing the Sicilian throne (the *Epistola de calamitate Siciliae*).³¹ Like Peter of Eboli, Hugo laments the passing of William II, but for a different political purpose. He writes not in support of the German pretender to the throne, but to mourn the absence of a convincing Norman contender. In his tableau of the chaos and terror that followed William’s death and the arrival of the German forces supporting Henry, Hugo depicts the children of Palermo “terrified by the harsh sounds of a barbarous tongue”—an extraordinary description of a city in which a dizzying array of languages must have been heard in the streets, spoken by natives as well as travelers passing through.³² Falcandus consistently makes the argument that the factor most propitious to peace in Sicily is accord between the Muslim and Christian populations; the presence of a foreign army could only exacerbate tensions between the two communities, particularly since the Germans have no understanding of or love for the beauty and riches of Sicily.

What we lack in the literary terrain of twelfth-century Sicily is *vernacular* literary composition. The Normans seem to have brought no substantial French tradition with them to Sicily.³³ And it is of course unlikely that such a complex linguistic environment as this, one that supported literary production in the three great literary languages of the medieval Mediterranean and where the residents spoke an indeterminable number of the colloquial tongues associated with those literary languages, would have generated a viable vernacular literary culture. Sicily was, during the Norman era, a state without an official tongue. Or rather, its official tongue was *its official tongues*. The three languages that appeared, in isolation or in various combinations, in Sicilian cultural production seem to have served, in a certain respect, the same function that a vernacular culture might serve in an environment that was more linguistically stable and less linguistically complex: they represented a cultural actuality by giving voice to the linguistic variety of contemporary Sicilian culture.

Nowhere is the fusion of languages in official Sicilian culture more evident than in the state’s signature coin, the tarí (fig. 4).³⁴ The Sicilian tarí was

produced first in Muslim Sicily. The Latin name for the coin derives from an Arabic word (*tarīyy*) meaning “fresh, new.” In a numismatic context, the term connoted “fresh from the mint; intact, unworn.” The tarí had an immensely broad circulation, in part because its relatively small size constituted a successful numismatic innovation. A quarter dinar, it represented the first “small change” of medieval Europe. And the consistently high standard of its metallurgic content contributed as well to its popularity.

The Muslims in Sicily had minted tarís before the Normans’ arrival. And the Lombards in southern Italy had produced tarís in imitation of the Muslim coins. The Normans issued tarís in their own names immediately after their conquest of Sicilian territory. These early Norman tarís faithfully duplicated the Muslim coin, reproducing the Muslim attestation of the faith, figuring the date not in the year of the Christian calendar but of the *hijra*, and giving the Norman prince’s name in Arabic transliteration.

As time went on, however, the Normans introduced innovations to the coin’s content. Count Roger’s tarís feature a new graphic element, a Greek *tau*. Numismatists do not agree on the significance of the *tau*, although most believe that it was meant to suggest a Christian cross. It seems certain, however, that the addition to the coin’s graphic content served to distinguish the Norman mintings from the Arab and Lombard emissions that preceded them. Count Roger’s son, Roger II, further modified the inscriptions during the early years of his rule. He adapted the Muslim attestation of the faith, making it not an affirmation of a Muslim creed but rather of monotheism in general. The new inscriptions read not “there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet,” but rather “there is no god but God—he alone, he has no companion.”

After he was made king of Sicily in 1130 Roger made further, more radical changes in the look of the tarí, and the graphic conventions he established would remain remarkably stable for the next 150 years. The profession of the unity of God disappeared, replaced by the name and honorific (*‘alama*) of the monarch, along with the name of the mint and the date in the year of the *hijra*. All this text—Roger’s name, the city, and the date, as well as the *‘alama*—appeared in Arabic. On the reverse, the Greek *tau* was modified to become an explicit cross. A Greek inscription, IC XC NI KA, appeared alongside the cross. The paired letters—an abbreviation of the phrase *Iesous Christos nika*, or “Jesus Christ will conquer”—were placed in the four corners made by the arms of the cross, and circled by an outer legend, as on the obverse, giving in Arabic the name of the mint and the date of the minting.

The Sicilian tarí would be issued in this form throughout the years of Norman domination, throughout the reign of Frederick II, and until Charles



Figure 4. Sicilian tarís struck in the name of the following monarchs: A (reverse) and B (obverse), in the name of Robert Guiscard (1072); C (reverse) and D (obverse), Roger I (circa 1085/87); E (reverse) and F (obverse), Roger II (1140-54); and G (reverse) and H (obverse), Frederick II (1220-50). (Images courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England)

I of Anjou's monetary reform of 1278. The reign of William II, associated with severe repressions of Muslim Sicilians, also saw an increase in the quantity and the accuracy of the tarí's Arabic inscriptions. But during the thirteenth century, the Arabic content of the coin would degenerate into pseudo-Cufic embellishment, arabesques that would be retained as part of the coin's design long after Arabic literacy was lost in Sicily.

During the Middle Ages, numismatic conservatism was the norm for newly formed states. Conquerors continued to mint the coinage of the conquered, despite its linguistic or even religious distance from their own language and religious practice. What is telling about the Norman tarí is its gradual transformation over time—a transformation that saw not the replacement of Arabo-Islamic content, but the effective integration of Islamic and Christian content. The tarí's extraordinarily dense inscriptions combined Christian and Muslim phrases and symbols, couched in Arabic and in Greek, geared to express one message. They represented the forceful power of the Norman monarch, a power that extended throughout the Mediterranean.

The Norman monarchs consistently stressed the message of power, and specifically the power to dominate against a multitude of foes, in their self-representations. Thus, following a decisive victory in a difficult battle in 1063, Count Roger (who, along with his brother, Robert Guiscard, spearheaded the initial Norman invasion of Sicily) had a passage from the Psalms inscribed on his shield: "Dextera Domini fecit virtutem; Dextera Domini exaltavit me" (Ps. 117:16).³⁵ The first phrase of this passage is somewhat awkward. In the Douay translation, which can generally be relied on to represent with accuracy the difficulties of the Vulgate, these words are rendered, "the right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength." Clearly, the Latin of the Vulgate is struggling with its Hebrew original here. The resulting phrase resounds with both a lingering ambiguity and a sense of power. The second half of the inscription presents no translation difficulties: "The right hand of God exalted me." The phrase is notable in the present context for the simple reason that it is very close in meaning, almost a translation *avant la lettre*, of the Arabic *'alama* that would be chosen by Roger II, Count Roger's son: *al-mu'tazz bi-llah*, "he who glories in the power of God," or more literally "the one exalted by [the power of] God." Indeed, the passage echoes the sentiments of all the Arabic and Greek inscriptions on the tarí, sketching a portrait in miniature of a ruler made invincible by divine support.

Though this citation may seem to be an unproblematic parsing of a biblical source, a glimpse at what precedes it in Ps. 117 reveals unsuspected layers of nuance: "All nations compassed me about; and in the name of the Lord I have been revenged on them. . . . They surrounded me like bees, and

they burned like fire among thorns: and in the name of the Lord I was revenged on them" (Ps. 117: 10, 12). Here is a portrait of the Norman warrior as what the Norman monarch will have been: toiling to win his Sicilian kingdom, compassed about by the Muslims who held out long and hard against him, soon to triumph over them. A century later, on the literary front at least, the Normans would have given up their fight against the Muslims. Arabic would take a place beside Latin and Greek as one of the languages of the victorious Normans' court—an acquired native tongue, at once foreign and familiar, different and legible. Norman Sicily mediated between the languages of the Islamic world, the Christian East, and the Christian West. It would be left for a later generation to produce a vernacular culture in the Kingdom of Sicily. What is most surprising about that development is how little time elapsed between the linguistic complexities of the Norman age and the emergence of a vernacular culture, and how complex—we must presume—the linguistic environment of Sicily remained, even during the age when Sicilian poets were writing the first poetry in an Italianate vernacular.

* * *

Michele Amari worked, in exile, to unravel the linguistic density of the Norman era. Amari not only shed light on a forgotten chapter of Sicilian history—one that was felt, despite its murkiness, to be central to Sicilian identity. His efforts also served to mitigate some of the divisions that had Balkanized modern understandings of Sicilian history. Though, as we will see, Amari accepted the periodization of Sicilian history along the fault lines of a series of colonial occupations (indeed, at times he celebrated Sicily's serial colonization as a source of cultural richness), his work affirmed a continuity unifying Sicilian history. And in his reading, Norman translations of Arabic culture were the key to understanding not only Sicily's transition from Muslim to Christian territory, but also the generation of a vernacular culture on the Italian peninsula.

Amari's life itself is typically Balkanized by modern scholars. In general, those who are interested in Amari as revolutionary don't dwell on his activities as an Arabist, while those who are drawn to his work as philologist don't address his revolutionist alter ego. There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to this generalization. One early biographer writes that in Amari's mature work as a historian, "the Arabist was grafted onto the patriot, never to be separated from him until the final day. They were united by a constant bond, building upon an identical foundation, pursuing the same object, undergoing through the same transformations and the same progress, arising through

their common efforts to the summit of their power.” But few of those biographers who celebrate Amari as revolutionary acknowledge his work as Orientalist—much less celebrate it in these overtly political tones, as republican hagiography. When they touch on Amari’s work as a scholar, his political biographers tend to recall his *early* work as a historian, despite the Sicilian separatist sentiments that inform it.³⁶

Amari undertook his first substantial work as a historian, a study on the 1282 uprising known as the Sicilian Vespers, during an early period in his life, when he was a Sicilian autonomist. And the story that Amari told about the Vespers clearly reflected his belief in autonomy as a solution to the problems that Sicily faced. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, an era when revolutionary movements (and counterrevolutionary responses) were sweeping Europe, resistance rose against the Bourbon government that ruled Sicily from Naples, and Amari shared those sentiments. In 1822, when he was seventeen years old, his father was sentenced to life in prison for his part in a plot to assassinate Bourbon ministers, and Amari left school to support his family. At the same time, he began to train as a revolutionary guerilla. But he was never to fight in the revolutionary cause, or at least not in the military branch of the struggle. Family responsibilities kept him at home. And in 1829 he fell in love, gave up his military training, and became an intellectual, publishing (in 1832) a translation of the voguish Walter Scott’s *Marmion*. If love first propelled him into the intellectual life, rejection in love compelled him to take his scholarship seriously. In 1839, his beloved’s family rebuffed Amari’s proposal of marriage. Amari threw himself into writing his history of the Vespers.

In 1837 the Bourbon government had enacted new legislation to isolate and neutralize those suspected of seditious activities. Targeted as a revolutionary, Amari was sent to the Bourbon government seat in Naples. In this first exile—which he felt bitterly, “a torture so atrocious that I almost lost my reason and my senses”³⁷—Amari drew on the royal archives in Naples to debunk the notion that the Vespers was conceived and executed by a cabal of elites. The common reading of the Vespers held that a small group of aristocratic revolutionaries, masterminded by a single charismatic leader, had orchestrated the uprising. *Giovanni da Procida* (1830), a popular tragedy by Giovanni Battista Niccolini which helped to spur Amari’s interest in the Vespers, exemplified this interpretation of the event. Basing his work on a perceptive and careful reading of historical documents, Amari read the Vespers as a popular resistance to a repressive foreign regime, which established a popular government able to survive for twenty years against strong opposition from Rome and Anjou. The result was a powerful and iconoclastic

reading of a historical event that also functioned as a polemic uniquely relevant to the historical moment, a revolutionary manifesto *a clef*. In the introduction to the fourth edition of this history, in a much-quoted line, Amari called the *Guerra del Vespro siciliano* an attempt to “issue the call for revolution, without being stopped by the censors.”³⁸ And one historian memorably dubbed the work the “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of Sicily.”³⁹ The Neapolitan censors did not catch the revolutionary subtext; they passed the work, and it was published in 1842. But its contemporary resonance did not remain long hidden. An eager public in Sicily had no difficulty reading between the lines. Invited to Naples to discuss his historical work with the government ministers, Amari chose instead to flee Sicily. In November 1842, after desperate days spent hiding in a granary outside Palermo, Amari left for Paris.

Before this second exile, Amari had already begun to express interest in Sicily’s Muslim history. He wished to reveal the Arabic contribution to the culture of the Italians—“the Arabic element,” he wrote to a friend, “accounted for a large part of Italian civilization during the Middle Ages”⁴⁰—and to rescue Sicily’s secret history, its forgotten centuries as a Muslim state. In an autobiographical sketch written years later, Amari remembered the steps that he took toward his intellectual conversion. He reported that he had read a translation of the history of Africa and Sicily written by Ibn Khaldun: “O if only I knew Arabic, then I could find some other unedited text on the Muslim domination in Sicily!” And Sicily’s Arab history represented for him an entrée into the little-known history of the *Norman* kingdom in Sicily: “I reflected again that the civil administration of Norman times was little enough understood, by virtue of the absolute ignorance of the conditions of the country during the Muslim era.” Finally, his Parisian exile allowed him access to Arabic schools and Arabic manuscripts. Thus, he made the decision to “throw myself into this sea of Arabic language and culture, and there I have floundered for almost forty years.”⁴¹

Thus, at the age of thirty six, Amari commenced his study of Arabic, with the intention of writing the history of a period and a dynasty altogether unknown to modern Europe. He made swift progress, publishing translations of descriptions of Sicily written by two medieval travelers—Ibn Hawqal and Ibn Jubayr—within two years of beginning the study of Arabic. In 1842, Amari had written to a friend that he was interested in “the history of Sicily during the Middle Ages, of which the Byzantine epoch, the Saracen era, and the period of feudal anarchy of the fourteenth century remain not much more than fairy tales. I am building castles—rather citadels in the air. . . . I want to try my hand at Arabic and, if the path is not too rocky, walk upon

it as far as I can." In 1844, he would report that he was at work on the history of the Arabs in Sicily: "I have set myself to excavate in a harsh terrain, because we know that once there was an ancient building there, and we hope to find the shards and use them to reconstruct the building."⁴² Amari traversed the distance between castles in the air and shards in the dusty earth in two short years.

But at a certain point, Amari's enthusiasm for "i nostri musulmani"⁴³ began to flag, and he seemed to recognize more and more keenly the distance between his medieval Muslim Sicilians and contemporary reality. He seemed even to fall into the nineteenth-century Orientalist trap of experiencing and expressing a certain distaste for the culture of the Arabs whose history he was writing. He began the monumental *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* in Paris and would continue to work on it until the final days of his life. In the closing pages, he would announce with an air of melancholy that the Muslims whose state he had so carefully reconstructed seemed to have left no traces at all in contemporary Sicily, aside from a few words, names, and culinary habits—"piccolezze," he would write, "trivialities scorned by historians of the past."⁴⁴

But the Norman period retained a curiously strong appeal for him even as his enthusiasm for Arab Sicily waned, primarily—in his telling—because of the Normans' ability to integrate the sophistication of Arab culture into their own, predominately Italianate culture. Amari expresses his fascination with the Normans in the opening pages of his *Storia dei musulmani*. He tells the reader that he will write a history of the Muslim colonies of Sicily that "encompasses the two conquests, the Arab and the Norman"—and in fact, Amari would devote nearly as many pages to the *Christian* Kingdom of Sicily as he did to Sicily under *Muslim* rule.⁴⁵ He lists a brief, dizzying history of the conquerors of Sicily: the Carthaginians, Vandals, Goths, Byzantines, Germans, French, and Spanish. Among these conquests, he says, four have had real, lasting importance: the Greek, the Roman, the Muslim, and the Norman—"or better, one should say *Italian*." At the close of his breathless précis of Sicilian colonial history, Amari writes that during the Norman era, ". . . that labor had been accomplished, under the aegis of a new people, which had been begun by the Arabs four hundred years earlier: Sicily, returned to power and splendor, predominated for the rest of the twelfth century among the Italian provinces; it mastered the southern regions of the Peninsula; it occupied temporarily some African cities, and scattered on the continent many of the seeds of that wondrous civilization of our common fatherland, which within a few centuries dispersed in Europe the shadows of

the Middle Ages.”⁴⁶ In this remarkable opening passage, Amari telescopes Sicilian history, casting the Normans as both its alpha and omega: the heirs of the Arabs, and the progenitors of the Italians.

During his exile in Paris, Amari would not only learn Arabic, become a creditable Arabic paleographer, and earn a reputation as the world’s foremost expert on Muslim Sicily. He would undergo an equally dramatic political transformation. As a young man, Amari scorned the “utopia” of unification and those activists who hoped to “italicizzare” Sicily.⁴⁷ On his departure from Sicily, he was and had been a Sicilian separatist. But while in exile, Amari would be converted from the dream of Sicilian independence (the anthem of which had been his history of the Sicilian Vespers) to the program of Italian unification. In the second half of his life, he would become a vocal proponent of a federated Italian state. Certainly, his new federalist sensibility, his desire to elevate the patrimony that Sicily held in common with Italy over any ethnic or cultural particularity peculiar to Sicily as a region, motivated to some extent the dismissal of the Arabic legacy in Sicily typical of his late work. As he rejected the notion of direct Arabic influence on Sicilian culture, however, he developed a new way of conceptualizing the passage of Arabic cultural forms to the mainland: *Norman ventriloquism* of Arab culture introduced the best aspects of that culture to a European audience. His work on the Vespers had taken the form of a blueprint for a popular uprising against an occupation government. His work on Muslim Sicily—or, more precisely, the pages on *Norman Sicily* included in his study on Muslim Sicily—provides a portrait of a federated government able to integrate discrete cultural and ethnic voices: a model for a modern Italian state able to balance regionalism and the exigencies of nationalization.

Amari takes pains to demonstrate the cost at which Normans created and maintained a unification government in Sicily. He details the Muslim uprisings that are brutally crushed. He describes the increasing severity of Muslim oppressions as the years of Norman rule in Sicily progress. He mentions Frederick II’s ultimate deportation of the Muslims of Sicily to a ghetto city on the Italian mainland. But he is also frank in his admiration of the Normans’ cultural policy, particularly when it is most far-sighted and catholic in its tastes. He celebrates, for instance, al-Idrisi’s geography, produced under Roger II’s commission—a “universal geography, using both the knowledge of the Orient and the Occident and the impetus introduced by new studies: the sort of work that, in the first half of the twelfth century, only the king of Sicily and of southern Italy could undertake.” He finds in projects like this evidence of the “refinement and prosperity” that “flowed back to the Peninsula and contributed to the splendor of the common fatherland.”⁴⁸

Amari had evolved from a renegade Sicilian separatist who believed in a once and future Sicilian nation to a federalist who recognized Sicily's difference but believed that its hope lay in an Italian republic. And Norman Sicily represented for him the distant image of a contemporary ideal: a federated state that, in its best moments, produced a coalition government able to sustain and even promote cultural heterogeneity. At the same time, he found in Norman Sicily a state both uniquely *Sicilian* and unquestionably *Italian*: the origin, indeed, of Italian identity.

The distance that Amari traveled from Sicily and from his intellectual and political roots made his ultimate homecoming to the island difficult. He returned to Sicily in 1848, before his conversion to Italian unification, to acclaim and honor from a Sicilian government that had won important concessions from the Bourbons. In April 1849, however, new crackdowns by the Bourbons would force him to leave again. In 1860, he would return permanently to Italy, but he would never again make his home in Sicily. Life in Paris had made him into a different man, and his new federalist convictions only underscored his distance from his old compatriots. He spent the rest of his life on the Italian peninsula, serving briefly in the Risorgimento government (1862–64), and contributing to the development of the Arabic program at the Istituto di Studi Superiori in Florence. In 1882, at the age of seventy six, Amari returned to Palermo for a final time to attend a ceremony marking the six hundredth anniversary of the Sicilian Vespers. His Sicilian hosts received him as an honored guest.

Despite the fact that he is almost universally admired as both historian and revolutionary, Amari's peculiar hybridity as an intellectual makes him a difficult figure to pin down. His modern biographers tend to bifurcate his intellectual career. Those biographers whose focus is Amari the Arabist, of course, recall his *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* more vividly. And those who concentrate on Amari the Risorgimento hero tend to neglect the bulk of his work as a scholar, and celebrate his first book on the Sicilian Vespers—a work informed by regionalist passion and Sicilian patriotism, produced by an ardent opponent of unification. Thus Benedetto Croce calls Amari's book on the Vespers "patriotic in inspiration and scientific in execution. . . . In the *Vespers*, the philologist had sitting beside him—giving him spirit and life—the ardent patriot: in the *Storia dei musulmani*, he was left alone, grown in stature, but alone."⁴⁹ Croce (like Falco, another of Amari's critics) distrusted Amari's later work on Muslim Sicily, suspecting it of an atavistic, eighteenth-century fixation on philological detail, along with the aggressive distrust of religious sentiment typical of Enlightenment intellectuals.⁵⁰ The *Guerra del Vespro siciliano* is seen as the anthem that expresses the sentiments of *l'Amari*

risorgimentale, not the *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*—a work that seems to be informed not by patriotic inspiration, but rather by a failure of *engagement*, a vague sense of melancholy.

But the melancholy of his later scholarly work is of a piece with Amari's political commitments. Melancholy was the fate of the nineteenth-century nationalist elite. Nationalist movements must be at once populist and elitist. They must recognize and embody a sense of national identity, *as it is defined by the people*. At the same time, they must provide guidance for the people, who without coherent leadership would not find their way toward independence and self-definition. This is the ambiguity and the contradiction of the nationalist elite's position. He must be *of* the nation, but somehow *above* the nation, of the people but still able to articulate the sense of national identity that the people themselves lack the grammar to express.

When he wrote the *Guerra del Vespro siciliano*, Amari had yet to face this impasse. He was able to read the distant Sicilian uprising as a spontaneous populist movement that—as he wrote in the preface to the 1843 Paris edition of the work—“arose from and was given force by the social and political condition of a populace neither accustomed nor disposed to enduring a tyrannical foreign domination.”⁵¹ A fervent belief that a similar popular revolt was possible for Sicily in the present informed Amari's history of the Sicilian Vespers. This sense of political engagement and immediacy accounts for the enduring appeal of his work on the Sicilian Vespers for those who remember him primarily as an intellectual during an era of revolution.

But during his mature years, when Amari had struggled at length with the problem of unification and more specifically with the place of regionalism within the movement of unification, he no longer saw such a model as a viable response to the problems that faced Italy or, more specifically, the problems that faced Sicily within the movement of unification. Amari speaks to the problem of Sicilian identity most tellingly not in his work on Muslim Sicily, nor even on the Sicilian Vespers, but in his discussion of *Norman Sicily*. In the *Storia dei musulmani*, Amari makes the Normans the means by which the cultural advances of the Arabs were transmitted to the Italian peninsula. And he identifies Sicily—and in particular, Sicilian translations of Arab cultural institutions—as the cradle of Italian culture. The Norman rulers of Sicily translated Arabic and Islamic culture into a form that could be used in a Christian and Latinate context, despite the radical, inassimilable difference between the two cultures.

Amari's Norman Sicily is an even more poetic creation than his *Guerra del Vespro siciliano*. His Normans are, in effect, nationalist elites who created a brilliant culture of synthesis out of the seemingly incommensurable diversity

present in medieval Sicily. They synthesized the Arabic and the Latin, Islamic culture and Christian culture. And so Amari used the Normans to represent the impasse of his stance as nationalist elite. Norman Sicily gave him a way to think a federated Italy that could integrate voices of difference, including that most intractably *un*-Italian of Italian territories: Sicily, which, by a paradox that consumed Amari as historian and political activist, as Sicilian and Italian, gave Italy the seeds of its culture and its very tongue.⁵²

* * *

Amari seems at moments like the consummate kaleidoscoped hero of a fragmented modernity. He recorded his own self-portrait in a series of *diari sparsi*. He was an erratic and unfocused diarist. One of his diaries, recording his first flight from Sicily, the days he spent concealed in a granary outside Palermo, and his arrival in Paris, is written in pencil on cheap transparent paper, and includes macaronic, vexingly epigrammatic entries such as “Idea—L’Europe au XIII Siècle,” or “24 Sabato Arabo. Arc de Triomphe. Pistolet.”⁵³ The diary itself, it must be said, promotes the sort of disassembled image of Amari typical of subsequent biographical memories of him. Amari is remembered today primarily as a hero of the Risorgimento. He had a separate life, however, as one of the premiere Orientalist philologists of the nineteenth century and the founding father of Siculo-Arabic studies. He seemed to understand himself to be a sort of revolutionary manqué. Although he fought in no battles, it was at certain times in his life his dearest dream to fight.⁵⁴ He spent years of his young manhood training as a guerrilla in preparation for war, taking up the study of Arabic only when he realized that he was too old for combat. And his turn to Arabic philology was motivated not only by the need to earn a living, but also by a desire to “bring pleasure, in some way, to my country.”⁵⁵ Amari, in fact, was something of an accidental intellectual, although the skill, the perception, and the discipline with which he executed his historical work belie that description. Unlike most of the philologists and historians of the nineteenth century, he has not come under attack for his crude understanding of historical events or his naïve historiography. Amari is that rarest of avatars: one whose scholarship has continued to serve posterity, even as times and tastes change.

Amari lived during an age when colonial expansions brought Europeans into renewed contact with the Arab world. And for this reason, the centuries of Arab domination in southern Europe became *legible* once again to Europeans. In the phrase that stands as the epigraph to this chapter—the final, unfinished sentence in the preface that Amari wrote for the revision of the

Storia that he was working on at the time of his death—Amari implicitly acknowledges the rebirth of interest in the history of Arab domination in Europe. Intending to introduce the system he would follow to transliterate Arabic words into the Latin alphabet, he wrote: “But Arabists are not the only ones who need to write and to read Arabic words, and so . . .” Arab culture and history no longer concerned specialists alone. Amari’s work as a historian both benefited from and contributed to the renaissance of interest in Arab history, the perception that the history of the Arab dynasties that once occupied southern Europe possessed a peculiar significance for modern Europeans.

If Amari’s work was aided by the cultural climate in which he wrote, it also was informed by his own instincts concerning the periodization of Sicilian history. Amari was an Arabist and a philologist whose work on Muslim Sicily stands as a precious resource for subsequent scholars of Siculo-Arabic history. But his work as a historian implicitly critiques the sharp demarcations between colonial regimes and cultural periods observed by modern historians (and in particular by literary historians). Amari initially approached *Muslim* Sicily in order to deepen his understanding of *Norman* Sicily. His great work on Muslim Sicily devoted almost as many pages to the Norman period as to the years of Arab domination, providing valuable details on the cultural institutions of Norman Sicily. Furthermore, Amari did not recognize a sharp distinction between Norman and Swabian Sicily. His history ends with the death of Manfredi, Frederick’s natural son and the last of the Norman line to pretend to the throne of the Kingdom of Sicily. Manfredi—Amari points out—sought refuge from the pope’s army in Lucera, the Muslim ghetto city in Puglia established by his father. And Manfredi, like his father, maintained contact with Arab intellectual figures outside Sicily and played host to prominent Arab visitors to Sicily. Thus, Amari’s archeology of “Muslim” Sicily challenges the periodization that disavows any continuity between Arab Sicily and Norman/Swabian Sicily. And it articulates the central cultural link that connects these eras: an investment in Arab cultural forms. Islamic culture—the most sophisticated culture of the era, in the scientific and technological fields—was the gift that Norman Sicily preserved and presented to the Italian mainland: “the seeds of that wondrous civilization of our common fatherland, which within a few centuries dispersed in Europe the shadows of the Middle Ages.”

Amari’s story is emblematic for understanding both Norman history and its afterlife, the way that subsequent eras would read it. The tale of Amari deciphering the Norman monuments in absentia serves as a stunning coda to the culture that the Normans themselves created in Sicily. The Normans, after all, lived a kind of exile in their Norman kingdom. But they created a

“homeland” in Sicily not by recreating *their* homeland but by continuing the cultural logic of the terrain they had possessed: by ventriloquizing another conqueror’s exilic homage to another homeland. The Norman monarchs occupied the palaces and hunting grounds vacated by the Muslim emirs they had displaced. And when they built their own palaces, they used the idiom of that earlier dynasty. They commissioned panegyrics from Arab poets; they created La Zisa and the Cuba, read as Arab constructions for centuries after their kingdom fell; they built a Christian chapel with a *muqarnas* ceiling and Arabic inscriptions. The Normans, in their new Sicilian kingdom, executed a cultural conquest that relied less on a naturalization of the culture of the conquered than on a complex cultural synthesis. Amari, in turn, would produce a detailed and accurate archeology of this web of cultural investments in order to disentangle the knot of his own exile (“a torture so atrocious that I almost lost my reason and my senses”).

The compound nature of Norman culture evidences the complex of cultural problems that the Normans met in Sicily. It articulates the problematic of a particular time and place: the challenges facing the culture of the Christian West in general, and the radically transitional nature of the Norman moment in Sicily in particular. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Islamic culture became associated with both danger and prestige in the Christian west. Thus, for instance—to trace just one battle line in the intricate process of cultural exchange between Muslims and Christians in contemporary Europe—while the Normans were building their Sicilian kingdom, translators in Spain worked to Latinize Islamic philosophical treatises. The philosophical texts that those translations made available to Christians would be removed from the curriculum of the University of Paris by papal interdicts in 1210 and 1215. Thomas Aquinas, who would receive his first training in the university established in Naples by Frederick II, produced an efficacious response to the philosophical battles of his age. He rejected the heterodox doctrines of the Islamic philosophers, while retaining their Aristotelian methodology and their fundamental intuition that God had created the human intellect capable of formulating an understanding of the natural world and even (within limits) of the mysteries of faith.

In this cultural context, the Normans’ exploitation of indigenous Siculo-Arabic culture looks like a canny deployment of an Arabic cultural avant-garde. During the Norman period, of course, cultural production remained compartmentalized along linguistic lines: Latin Sicilians recorded the history of the Normans; Greeks produced translations and liturgical works; Arabs wrote poetry. What synthetic texts emerged—for all their stunning transgression of linguistic, cultural, and confessional boundaries—were extraliterary works

(coins, inscriptions, and decorative elements in royally sponsored architecture) intended to advertise the power of the Norman monarch over the populations represented by the languages used. In the last analysis, the Norman domination in Sicily was a short-lived era and, for all its cultural graces, a brutal one. Norman culture was experimental, transitional, and radically *inachevée*. The promises of the twelfth century would be fulfilled only during the thirteenth, when a Romance vernacular culture would emerge to fill the void left by the extinction of the Arabic poetic tradition in Sicily.

3. Frederick II and the Genesis of a Sicilian Romance Culture

THE LAST TWO NORMAN monarchs of Sicily of any longevity were known, respectively, as William the Bad and William the Good. A second nickname might be awarded the second of the two Williams given the public outcry that followed his death: William the Lamented (fig. 5). His death on November 18, 1189 plunged Sicily into chaos and confusion, as two opposed camps—the Norman barons, and the Hohenstaufen emperor Henry VI—contended for the Sicilian throne. A number of contemporary historical sources remember William most vividly for the storm of mourning that followed his death. The echoes of this tradition reached Dante; in the *Divine Comedy*, Dante memorializes him as “the mourned one.” The pilgrim catches sight of the Sicilian monarch in Paradise: “he whom you see,” Dante is told, “was William—lamented by that land that bemoans a living Charles and Frederick” (*Paradiso* XX, 61–63). In this brief passage, with his usual efficiency, Dante manages both to celebrate a dead king (William, a paragon of princely virtues, will spend eternity in the celestial sphere of just rulers) and castigate his heirs (Charles II of Anjou and Frederick III of Aragon, contemporary rulers of Puglia and Sicily, condemned for their injustices to the states they rule).

A witness closer to the events left a more detailed account of the crisis precipitated by William’s death. Rycardus de Sancto Germano, author of an elegant chronicle that covered the years of the interregnum following William’s death and most of the reign of Frederick II, introduced his Sicilian history with an abject *planctus* on William’s passing: “Oh unhappy Kingdom without a King, now you are bound by no law!”¹ In his description of William’s death, and of the impact of his passing on Sicilian history, Rycardus follows an itinerary common to accounts of the collapse of the Norman regime. He describes the mourning kingdom at length, reporting that men of all ranks lament William’s passing, and all the women of the land, both virgins and matrons. In the same way, other witnesses will use the occasion of William’s death to celebrate the unity of Norman Sicily, a unity that many fear will be lost with the demise of the Norman dynasty. But from eulogy, Rycardus passes swiftly to elegy. He describes the disorder and contention into which the kingdom descended as soon as William died. Without a central authority to impose order, he tells us, Christian and Muslim Sicilians took up arms against each other. The Norman king’s death without heir has threatened the security and stability of the state by removing the monarch whose authority imposed a cultural unity on the diverse communities within it.



Figure 5. As William lay dying. In the upper half of this elaborate manuscript illustration from Peter of Eboli's *De rebus siculis carmen*, an Arab doctor and astrologer attend the dying king; following his death, the ladies of the court mourn him. The people of Palermo lament the fallen king in the lower half. (Copyright Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120. II, fol. 97r)

The death of William II, which initiated a period of political, social, and economic havoc in the Sicilian state, provoked as well a cultural interregnum. The Norman government had balanced its Latin, Greek, and Arabic constituencies, generating a culture of translation in order to negotiate between its populations and to do business with the greater Mediterranean world. As time went on, despite the increasingly marginal position of Arabs within the Sicilian state, Arabic culture was manipulated with increasing sophistication by that state. William II took pains to represent himself as a monarch with fluency in Arabic cultural practices, while at the same time placing severe restrictions on the economic activities of Arab Sicilians. The collapse of the Norman regime and the arrival of a new contender on the Sicilian scene—German Henry, who brought with him his own ethnic chauvinisms and was perceived by many Sicilians as a cultural and linguistic outsider—threatened the cultural operations and the cultural autonomy of the Sicilian state. Sicily was nearing the end of its existence as an independent state. Over the course of the following century, it would come to be ruled from the Italian mainland, and its culture would be gradually Latinized and Christianized.

Typically historians draw a line between Norman Sicily and Swabian Sicily, between the state ruled by the full-blooded Norman monarchs and the state ruled by Henry's son, Frederick II. But when these two phases of Sicilian history are collated, the coherences that link them become apparent. Frederick, who occupied the Sicilian throne from 1196 until 1250, was lauded by his contemporaries and is still celebrated by historians as one of the most remarkable monarchs of the Middle Ages. A man of prodigious energy and extraordinary talent in both political and cultural matters, Frederick presided over a period of dynamic cultural activity in Sicily, a “Sicilian half century” that saw remarkable developments in the fields of statecraft, the sciences, and literature. But the Swabian state in Sicily should be seen not as a departure from the Norman state, but rather as a culmination of the bureaucratic institutions and cultural practices established by the Normans. Many of the cultural advances central to the Sicilian miracle of the thirteenth century represent continuations of twelfth-century Norman initiatives that had fallen into disrepair during the interregnum that followed the death of William II, but were aggressively revived under Frederick. The manipulation of Arabic culture, so central to Sicilian cultural formations during the Norman period, remained a keynote of Sicilian culture during Frederick's reign. But whereas the Norman monarchs treated Arabic as a primary cultural vehicle—an acquired native tongue—under Frederick, Arabic was increasingly handled as a foreign language, one that must be translated in order to be understood.

Frederick—a larger than life figure, about whom fabulous myths circulated

in late medieval Europe—owed much of his fascination to his associations with the Muslim world. In 1228, despite a papal edict excommunicating him, Frederick embarked on crusade, and he used his knowledge of Arabic and his connections with the Ayyubid governor al-Kamil in order to negotiate a bloodless victory in Jerusalem. His fluency in Arabic impressed even his Arab hosts; historian Sibt Ibn al-Jauzi records with admiration an Arabic pun Frederick pronounced while touring Jerusalem. Frederick possessed a boat named *Nusf al-dunya*, “half the world”—at once a reference to the marine half of the planet that the boat would navigate, and an ambitious statement of the projected dimensions of Frederick’s kingdom. Arabic scientific works were translated at his court; he was rumored to have in his employ the sons of the Andalusian philosopher Averroes. Certainly his own pragmatic attitude toward the natural sciences owed something to his exposure to the sophisticated scientific theories of Islamic philosophers. In compiling his own treatise on falconry, the *De arte venandi cum avibus*, he consulted Arab authorities, along with Western treatises and the works of Aristotle. In his prologue to that work he described himself as “a seeker and a lover of knowledge” and announced his intention to talk about things that are “as they are, and to record with the certainty of art matters concerning which no one has yet possessed scientific or applied knowledge.”² In a darker anecdote, he was said to have had a man killed inside a barrel, comparing the weight of the barrel before and after his death in order to determine whether the soul had substance. The story, though certainly fabulous, may have inspired Dante, who gave Frederick an eternal dwelling place in the *Inferno* among the Epicureans who denied the immortality of the soul.

The associations that Frederick established with the Arab world should be read as extensions of the Norman monarchs’ Arab connections. But, although he maintained an intimate contact with Arab culture and Arab leaders, Frederick’s reign coincided with an attenuation of Arab culture within the Kingdom of Sicily. And Frederick himself engineered the containment of his Arab subjects in Lucera, on the Italian peninsula. Lucera functioned, like the parks of Norman Sicily, as an Arab cultural preserve, a place to which the monarch retired in order to relax in Oriental splendor. The containment of Muslim Sicilians exemplifies a broader trend occurring in Sicily during this period: the translation of Sicilian culture from a complex, multilingual formation with a strong Arabic component into a Latin-based culture that viewed Arabic as neither wholly native nor entirely alien. During Frederick’s reign, for the first time since the collapse of the Roman Empire, Sicily came to be seen and ruled as an extension of the European mainland. The gradual transformation of Arabic culture into a culture to be translated or imported, and

the symmetrical articulation of Latin and, ultimately, Romance literary traditions in Sicily, served to promote the increasing Europeanization of the kingdom. This process advanced inexorably throughout Frederick's reign, despite his perception outside Sicily as a figure with significant and disturbing connections to the Muslim world.

Michele Amari believed that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Kingdom of Sicily bridged two broader cultural worlds: the Arabo-Islamic, and the Western Christian. Under the Norman monarchs and Frederick II, Sicilians generated a hybrid culture that grafted a Christian sensibility and Christian cultural practices onto a foundation of Arabic and Islamic cultural and bureaucratic institutions. By translating those Arab institutions into a form that could be used by Christian Europeans, the Sicilians—to borrow Amari's florid phrasing—sowed the seeds of the Italian culture that would flower during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this chapter I will examine the transition between Norman and Swabian rule, and in particular the central role played by the Sicilian monarch in orchestrating that transition, in order to describe the process by which Arabic culture was “translated” in Sicily.

* * *

Either during the desperate battles for control of the Sicilian throne, or soon after Henry's accession to power, an observer (presumably Hugo Falcandus, also the author of a history of Norman Sicily) produced an account of the tumultuous events that followed William's death. The author was unapologetically hostile to the German camp. At the time that he wrote, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Norman barons would lose control of the state and that the Germans—whom Hugo consistently calls “barbari”—would come to power. This, he asserted, was a calamity of epic proportions. His account balanced elegy for the fallen Norman state and anti-German invective to paint a portrait of the events he witnessed and their significance for Sicily.

Hugo's letter from Sicily followed the same pattern as Rycardus's description of the collapse of the Sicilian state following William's death, investing that narrative with an urgent political theme: Sicilians must return to what unites them in order to resist the invading Germans. Beginning with a lament for William, he described the confusion into which the kingdom had fallen, and the Sicilians' despair. All Sicilians, he states—Christians and Muslims, men and women, young and old—mourned the king's death. Along with these elegiac elements, Hugo also described the impact that William's

death and the arrival of the Germans had on relations between Christians and Muslims. It was inevitable, Hugo wrote, that the anarchy that followed the monarch's death would provoke tensions between Muslim and Christian Sicilians—"because it is difficult, among such tempestuous events, with no fear of the king, for Christians *not* to attack Saracens." And he issued an urgent call for accord between Christians and Muslims, for the election of a king to save them from this impasse: "If only the nobles and commoners, both Christian and Saracen, would reach a consensus, so that they might harmoniously choose a king for themselves, and with all their strength, with all their vigor and all their will they might strive to drive out the invading barbarians!"³

Certainly, relations between Muslims and Christians in Sicily were never entirely free of tension; the years of Norman rule in Sicily witnessed periodic Muslim uprisings and Christian oppression of Muslims. Hugo's nostalgia for the lost peace of Norman Sicily must be read with an appropriate sense of skepticism. What remains striking about his account, however, is his argument that only a Muslim-Christian coalition—the sense of a common purpose and a common sentiment apparent, for instance, when Muslims and Christians together mourn the passing of the Sicilian king—can save the Sicilian state. Hugo affirmed the sense of a common Sicilian identity at precisely the moment when instability threatened and undermined that identity. Thus, in a passage cited earlier (above, p. 32), Hugo created a pathetic portrait of the German invasion by describing the children of Palermo "terrified by the harsh sounds of a barbarous tongue."⁴ One must assume that these children were accustomed to hearing Arabic, French, Italian, Greek, and the miscellaneous languages that entered the port of Palermo from every corner of the Mediterranean and marvel at the finely tuned linguistic sensibility that Hugo attributes to them. At other points in his history of Sicily Hugo asserted his Sicilian patriotism by castigating the "alienigena" (foreign-born) who found their way to the Sicilian court during peacetime: a Frenchman who arrived with ambitions to rise fast in the ecclesiastical bureaucracy; a Spaniard who didn't speak French and thus found himself at sea at the Norman court.⁵ For all its cultural and ethnic complexity, Hugo seems to have felt (or at least to have found it politically expedient to assert) a sense of cultural integrity in Sicily. His outcry against the barbarian invasion that followed William's death demonstrates his sense of what would be lost should control of Sicily pass to a non-Sicilian.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Peter of Eboli, who wrote in defense of the German *barbari*, produced a triumphalist account of William's death that disavowed the broader cultural tragedy of the event. He presented it as the melancholy but necessary prelude to the arrival of a celebrated

monarch, Henry. Like Rycardus and Hugo, Peter described the mourning of the various constituencies of the Sicilian kingdom. And like Rycardus and Hugo, he followed this lament with a description of the chaos that ensued as the result of squabbles over succession. But Peter did not dwell on the kingdom's cultural complexity, or call on its cultural communities to unite as Sicilians. Although his narrative began with a memorable epithet memorializing the disparate communities of the Sicilian kingdom, he wrote to celebrate the German emperor's dominance of the Sicilians, rather than calling for a return to a Norman ideal.⁶

Peter's elegy for William is most familiar to modern readers for its opening verse, apostrophizing Palermo as "urbs felix, populo dotata trilingui"—"fortunate city, endowed with a trilingual people."⁷ Peter's phrasing drew on an established epithet for Sicily. We find the designation *trilinguis*—"trilingual"—also in Apuleius and Ovid, for whom the three Sicilian tongues were Latin, Greek, and Punic.⁸ The epithet serves to represent both the cultural and physical geography of the island, implicitly acknowledging another of the images used since antiquity to symbolize Sicily. Sicily is roughly triangular; thus it was known not only as the island of three languages, but also the island of three capes. Its three sides face the three shores of the Mediterranean, the three regions from which settlers came to Sicily during antiquity and the early Middle Ages: the European continent at the northern edge of the Mediterranean, the Greek archipelago and the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, and the border of the African continent along the southern Mediterranean. The Trinacria (the face of Medea, three bent legs creating a triangle that frames her face), used since antiquity as a symbol of Sicily, represents the island's triangular form. These tripled images describing Sicily serve as efficient shorthand evocations of the geographical form and location of the island, as well as its cultural and linguistic complexity.

Peter of Eboli's lament for William—with its elegant opening line, a sophisticated nod toward historical representations of Sicily—elegized one chapter of Sicilian history and heralded the beginning of another, glorious era. Peter acknowledged Sicily's linguistico-cultural complexity. But he did not join Hugo in mourning the collapse of communication between populations or the battles between Muslims and Christians. William's death was not for him a tragic affair; he wrote a triumphalist history focusing on the rise of the German emperor. Peter, a partisan of the Germans and of the Latinate culture that would emerge from the confusion of tongues in Sicily following the fall of the Norman state, mourned the fallen Norman king in part to honor Norman Constance, Henry's wife, and the mother of Henry's heir. His primary purpose, however, seems to be to establish a rupture between

the Norman past, which ended with the death of the lamented King William, and the glory and promise of the Hohenstaufen future.

With the collapse of the Norman state, the linguistic structure of Norman culture—the mediation between tongues negotiated by the Normans, both through their patronage of monolingual projects in the kingdom's three languages and their production of multilingual or culturally complex works—also failed. Saracens and Christians battled each other; royal patronage of cultural projects came to an end. And the production of texts that combined the tongues of Muslim and Christian Sicilians ceased or was radically attenuated. Following the death of William II, the kingdom would lack the stability that might support cultural vitality until the maturity of Frederick II—that is, for almost a generation, from 1189 until 1208. Fortunately for Sicily (or at least for Sicilian culture, if not for all Sicilians), Frederick was a strong ruler with an aggressive vision for his Sicilian kingdom. He would forge a dynamic cultural unity out of the fragments that survived the fall of the Norman dynasty.

* * *

When it became apparent that he would not produce an heir to succeed him on the Sicilian throne, William II removed his aunt, Roger II's daughter, Constance, from her convent and married her to the German emperor Henry VI. On William's death in 1189, Henry mobilized his forces and made a serious bid for power in Sicily. Constance justified William's faith in her by giving birth to a son, Frederick II, in 1194. Constance was more than forty years old when her only child was born. It is said that she gave birth in a tent erected in the central piazza of the southern Italian town of Jesi, or again that she displayed her lactating breasts in public in order to preempt or counter rumors that she was too old to produce an heir herself and had used other means to acquire one. Frederick's father died in 1197 and his mother ruled the kingdom as regent for her son until her death in 1198. Pope Innocent III—whose aid Constance had enlisted during the final year of her life, apparently in order to contain and combat German power in Sicily—served as regent for the orphaned infant, who spent his childhood in the houses of various Sicilian barons. The young king was left much to himself under his guardians' care, and according to medieval sources roamed the streets of Palermo, absorbing Sicilian culture at first hand. It was said of the adult Frederick that he could understand Arabic and Greek, as well as Latin and the vernaculars he found it necessary to use in the course of his career—Italian,

French, and German. He would have acquired most of these languages—with the exception, one presumes, of the tongue of the *barbari*, German—during his largely unsupervised youth in Sicily.

If the kingdom descended into a long and anarchic interregnum following the death of William II, that lawlessness ended after Frederick took power upon his maturity in 1208. The strong bureaucracy of the Norman state had gone to seed during the years of interregnum. Frederick reestablished order in Sicily by restoring the institutions established by the state's Norman monarchs. But because those institutions had collapsed, Frederick's Sicilian kingdom has the feel of a revival or even a strong reading of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. In the cultural context, Frederick promoted a renaissance of literary culture in Sicily by streamlining that culture. The Curia's documents were produced almost exclusively in Latin. The Sicilian court lost the fluency in Arabic for which it had been celebrated during the years of Norman rule. Frederick brought in translators from outside the kingdom to write his Arabic correspondence and to produce Latin versions of Arabic scientific works. Arabic became a language of translation.

Midway through his reign as Sicilian king, in 1236, Frederick produced a letter drumming up support for one of his ceaseless military campaigns. The letter opens with a rousing (and significantly streamlined) evocation of Sicily's history and a thumbnail picture of the state at the height of its power with an insistent focus on the monarch who stands at the center of that power. "To the envy of all nations subjected to all the kings and princes of the earth," the letter begins, "the faithful of the realm of Sicily have always demonstrated not only the enthusiastic fidelity they owed to their lords, but also the zeal of a certain innate affection toward them." The tone that Frederick strikes in this opening sentence is consistent with the monarchic self-presentations of the Norman era. He represents the strength of the sovereign as the central fact of the Sicilian state and the source of its coherence. The history of Sicily that follows is most curious for what it leaves out.

The empires of the Romans and Greeks had divided this noble span of land into restive territories, placing them under the control of the pernicious deputies of the occupying armies. But after it came to be called a kingdom, through our ancestors' first, valiant consolidation, so greatly did its inhabitants love the name of regal dignity and the throne that they chose our ancestors as kings and lords; they faithfully defended the lands acquired; and they valiantly strove to subject barbarous peoples [to their rule]. And although from our progenitors' virile beginnings there sprang an ample enough harvest, nevertheless we believe these fruits—with the emergence of a new stock, which has taken root in those born in the kingdom—to be neither inferior in diligence, nor lesser in vigor.⁹

The emphasis on Sicilians' duty to obey the Sicilian monarch is, of course, not surprising in a letter produced with the specific purpose of generating support for a military venture. And yet the terms in which Frederick makes his appeal are striking: the emphasis on the continuity with the Norman past, balanced against an effort to differentiate the "new stock" of his own generation with that past; the depiction of the Greek and Roman states in Sicily as barbarous provinces; and, most noteworthy, the elision of Sicily's years as an Arab territory. Frederick's history of Sicily alludes to Muslim Sicilians only when it mentions the "barbarous peoples" whom his Norman ancestors subjected to their rule.

At the time when he wrote this letter, Frederick had achieved the consolidation of the kingdom, dispelling the specter of anarchy that haunted the region at the beginning of his career. He possessed a strong vision of the cultural strengths and the cultural dynamic of his kingdom, and this vision did not include a vital Arabic presence. Frederick's reign saw a revival of Latin letters in Sicily. Pier delle Vigne, an administrator and notary in Frederick's government until he fell out of favor and was imprisoned, would become one of the most celebrated Latin stylists of his age. And a new Sicilian literary tradition emerged when poets forged a new literary language, based on the Romance vernacular spoken in Sicily, and used this language as a vehicle for love lyrics. The attenuation of Arabic as a language of culture in general and of poetry in particular made the consolidation of Latin letters and the generation of a Romance poetic culture possible and even necessary.

None of Frederick's actions demonstrate the waning centrality of Arabic culture in Sicily more clearly than his creation of a Muslim ghetto-city on the Italian mainland. By the early 1220s, Frederick had begun to deport Muslims from the island to Lucera, near the city of Foggia.¹⁰ The majority of the Arab population had already left the urban centers of Sicily. The communities that remained in the hill country were a source of civil unrest and insurrection, and Frederick explained his relocation of Sicilian Muslims as a way to restore peace and order to the territory.¹¹ Modern historians disagree about the scope and the details of Frederick's project: Was the land surrounding Lucera underpopulated and thus underworked? Or did Frederick depopulate the city and the surrounding land in order to give the displaced Muslims homes and fields?¹² In either case, the establishment of the colony constituted an aggressive act of agricultural, industrial, and indeed ethnic engineering. Lucera generated substantial revenue for Frederick. In addition to farming the surrounding land, the residents of the city manufactured arms and produced wood inlays. They also provided a standing army for Sicily's endless battles. The creation of the colony at Lucera, in sum, was a work of political genius

typical of Frederick. It eliminated a chief source of unrest on the island, contributed to the cultivation of underutilized land, and provided a ready source of revenue and military support.

Lucera became one of Frederick's pet projects. We possess records of him erecting in the town a copper fountain sculpted in the image of a man and a cow and ordering that eight camels and two leopards be sent from Malta to Lucera.¹³ The town served as a royal getaway. We know that Frederick maintained a palace in Lucera (built, according to a scandalized Pope Gregory, on the site of a cathedral that Frederick had razed), although we have little information about palace life in the city.¹⁴ Presumably, both the fountain and the fabulous animals sent to Lucera were destined for Frederick's residence there, rather than for public consumption. And we know that Frederick maintained a harem for his use on his visits to Lucera; we have records of him ordering clothing for the women of the harem.¹⁵ We can perhaps be forgiven for thinking that Frederick's Lucera, with its catalogue of marvels, sounds like an eastern metropolis described by Marco Polo or even a fantastic city imagined by Italo Calvino.

Predictably, the town and Frederick's ongoing support of it became a bone of contention with the ecclesiastical authorities. Pope Gregory IX denounced Frederick for "allowing the name of Muhammad to be proclaimed publicly day and night in the temple of the Lord"—that is, in Lucera's mosque, which had been a church before the town's conversion.¹⁶ And he lamented that the Saracens of Lucera were dismantling a church, and using the stones to build their homes.¹⁷ The question of sending priests to convert the town's Muslims proved a source of ongoing tension. Frederick claimed to be in favor of the pope's envoys, but he seems to have offered them a somewhat lukewarm reception. Gregory instructed Frederick—perhaps with a touch of condescension—to allow those Saracens who "*italicum idioma non mediocriter ut fertur intelligunt*" ("who, we hear, understand at least a modicum of Italian") to listen to the priests sent to convert them. And Frederick responded dutifully that he would grant the pope's missionaries access to the city and to those residents who understood Italian.¹⁸ But one suspects that Frederick did not make it easy for missionaries to preach to the Muslims of Lucera. Gregory's successor, Innocent IV, complained that Frederick did not allow his priests entrance to the city.¹⁹ And even if Innocent exaggerated Frederick's hostility for political gain, it seems evident (and altogether characteristic of him) that Frederick did little to promote the Muslims' conversion. The isolation of the city's residents served his purposes by making them easier to manage and manipulate. And Lucera's Muslim warriors would presumably lose their legendary fierceness if they became Christians.

Although he specified in his will that upon his death the mosques of Lucera should be reconverted to churches, the Muslim colony outlived Frederick.²⁰ His natural son, Manfredi, called on the residents of Lucera for military support as Frederick had done. And he took refuge there when he needed a hideout from the armies of the pope. The new Angevin rulers of Sicily would undertake to destroy the city in 1300, after almost a century of existence; its residents were killed or sold into slavery. Presumably, the Angevins, unlike the Swabians, were not able to extract military, economic, or recreational value from Lucera.

Frederick's policy toward Sicily's Muslim population must be understood alongside his interactions with Arabic culture. At Frederick's court, important Arabic scientific texts were imported and translated. He maintained diplomatic relations with Muslim rulers in the eastern Mediterranean. He communicated with Arab scholars. But he did not promote an Arabic cultural presence within Sicily. He did not bring Muslim scholars to his court. And although he closely supervised his Arab subjects as warriors, farmers, and artisans, lived alongside them when he visited Lucera, and had more intimate knowledge of them in his Lucera harem, he did not support native Sicilian cultural production in Arabic. Rather, he commissioned professional translators—first Michael Scot, Frederick's court “astrologus,” then Theodore of Antioch, whose job description was more ambitious: “philosophus et fidelis noster”—to produce his Arabic correspondence and interpret the scientific texts he imported.²¹ And through his scientific and diplomatic correspondence with distant, eminent Muslims, he constructed an idealized Muslim “virtual community.” Thus Frederick translated those aspects of Arab culture that served him into a language that served him and contained or distanced those aspects that might present a source of civil unrest in his Sicilian kingdom. Frederick seems to have wanted not to purge the Sicilian kingdom of its Arabs and Arabic cultural heritage, but rather to recast Arab Sicily into a form that he could more easily manipulate.

In 1853, Michele Amari published an article identifying Frederick as the addressee of a letter written by the Muslim scholar Ibn Sab'in. This correspondence provides the best evidence we have of Frederick's philosophical communication with a Muslim intellectual. Ibn Sab'in was a melancholy and troubled intellectual who was strongly influenced by the Greek peripatetics and their Arab commentators and persecuted throughout his life for his religious and philosophical teachings and writings. He was born in al-Andalus in 1217/18; Frederick's letter reached him when he was living in Ceuta (in present-day Morocco). He died in Mecca probably in 1270, reportedly by opening his veins—a death in the true Stoic tradition. Amari unearthed a

manuscript in the Bodleian Library addressed by Ibn Sab'in to an unnamed "King of the *Rumi* [Romans, or Christians] and Prince of Sicily." The letter tells us that the Sicilian monarch had sent a number of questions to the urban centers of the Mashriq (the eastern Mediterranean) and Ifriqiyya (present day Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria) and had received no adequate answer to them. Finally, he heard about the reputation of Ibn Sab'in, in the Maghreb, and sent the questions to him.²² The letter provides Ibn Sab'in's responses to the monarch's questions on philosophical and religious matters. The first of these questions, for instance, concerns Aristotle's statement that the world is not created, but eternal. Ibn Sab'in's response delves into the definitions of relevant philosophical terminology to demonstrate that Aristotle was wrong.²³ The composer of the text (who was not Ibn Sab'in himself, but a secretary who recorded Ibn Sab'in's responses to Frederick's questions) is quite sassy and outspoken. He reports, with unconcealed satisfaction, that Ibn Sab'in humiliated the Christian prince by refusing the gifts with which he tried to pay for the responses to the questions.²⁴ The letter ends with a suggestion that Frederick come to Ibn Sab'in in person to be tutored, since it is apparent that he needs plenty of guidance: "your question makes it clear that you do not know the sciences and that you are untutored in the speculative doctrines, but that at the same time you wish to walk in the light of truth."²⁵

Frederick's correspondence with Ibn Sab'in demonstrates his awareness of the centrality of Arabic letters and the Islamic sciences to contemporary intellectual life. It equally evidences, however, the fact that Frederick perceived the Islamic sciences as a foreign product that must be imported. Unlike the Normans, who employed Arab secretaries, poets, and scientists, Frederick did not rely on Arabs to manage his diplomatic correspondence, to compose literary works in Arabic, or to translate texts from the Arabic. Work must still be done in order to determine the presence and the extent of the activities of Arab intellectuals in Frederick's Sicily. In a provocative recent article, for instance, Charles Burnett takes into serious consideration the medieval tale that Frederick brought Averroes's sons to Sicily. And little is known of the Jewish scholars who translated Arabic texts for Frederick.²⁶ But it seems clear that Christian philosophers and translators provided Frederick's chief means of access to Arabic scientific texts. Michael Scot, whose credentials were excellent—he came to Sicily from Toledo—was said to have translated Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* into Latin while in residence in Sicily, though no trace of this translation survives. When he left Sicily, he was replaced by Theodore of Antioch, who was responsible for a translation of a work on falconry, used by Frederick when writing his *De arte venandi cum avibus*, and possibly also for a translation of Averroes's commentary on

Aristotle's *Physics*. Theodore remained in Sicily until his death, apparently by suicide. The Syriac bishop Barhebraeus reports that Theodore yearned for his homeland and his family, but Frederick would not consider releasing him. When Frederick left on a journey, Theodore packed his bags and sought berth on a ship himself, intending to return home. "But on their journey a wind blew and threw them ashore at a town in which the king had anchored. When this was announced to Thadhuri [Theodore], he took some poison which he had with him and died, from shame rather than fear, because the king would not have allowed someone like him to be killed."²⁷

Many of the medieval legends that circulated about Frederick dwell on his lust for knowledge, and many of them add that in order to satisfy his appetites, Frederick turned to Islamic sources. Thus, for instance, the *Book of Sydrac*—a compendium of scientific knowledge compiled in French during the thirteenth century—memorializes Frederick's legendary search for scientific verities. The introduction to that text sketches the history of its genesis, a tale that bears striking parallels to Frederick's philosophical correspondence with Ibn Sab'in: it describes Frederick sending communiqués to Arab savants in search of answers to timeless philosophical and theological questions. And in response to Frederick's request an obliging Tunisian sage produces a dusty volume from his library, embodying answers that an earlier sage by the name of Sydrac had produced to an earlier ruler's questions. The introduction tells us that God singled out Sydrac, one of Noah's children, to receive revelation on the essential mysteries of life. He was granted even an *avant la lettre* understanding of the Trinity. Such was his reputation for learning that a monarch possessed of a restless desire to understand the physical and metaphysical sciences sought him out and put to him a list of questions, and the body of the text gives those questions and Sydrac's answers.²⁸ Thus *Sydrac* presents a response to Frederick's search for knowledge in the form of answers Sydrac gave to another inquiring monarch, thousands of years earlier.

Following this description of the genesis of the text, the introduction details the translations that the text underwent, and its various incarnations trace a remarkable *translatio studii*. The text was initially composed at a short remove from the dawn of time—during the generation of the sons of Noah. It passed from hand to hand after its composition, and then fell into obscurity for some time. After Jesus' life and crucifixion, the text itself was resurrected and carried to Spain by a Christian missionary who was subsequently martyred in Toledo. Once again the book was lost, to come to light following the establishment of a regular church in Toledo. At this point, the introduction tells us, the work was translated from Greek into Latin (leaving the

reader to conclude that the sons of Noah spoke Greek). When the fame of *Sydrac* reached the king of Tunis, he sent for it and had it translated “de latin en sarrazinois.” While the book was still in Tunis, the emperor Frederick heard about it from one of his messengers. Having made the appropriate arrangements with the Tunisian king, Frederick sent a monk to Tunis to translate the work back into Latin. Next, the text tells us, Theodore of Antioch—the Sicilian translator of the unfortunate fate—learned of its existence. Impatient to see it and apparently unwilling to await the authorized version, he contrived to have a copy of it snuck into his possession. After a time, Theodore passed his contraband copy on to an Antiochan patriarch visiting Sicily. Having returned to Antioch, the patriarch passed it on to a clerk, who in turn brought it (back) to Toledo. There, it was vernacularized by a committee of learned clerics.²⁹

Sydrac, thus, was translated from Greek into Latin, thence into Arabic, once again into Latin, and finally into Romance: an itinerary reproducing, in most of its details, the dissemination of the natural and theological sciences from the Near East in late antiquity to Europe during the high Middle Ages. Frederick’s role in this chain of transmission was to carry the text back from a Muslim orbit into the Christian world by commissioning its second Latin version, a high medieval text to supersede the patristic Latin redaction. Sicily—or, more precisely, the agency of the Sicilian monarch—serves as a staging ground between Arabic and Latin. And the story of the text’s passage through Sicily does not overlook the tragic element so common to Sicilian tales: *Sydrac*, poignantly, made it to Antioch, although Theodore—whose unauthorized copy of the text is the one that journeys east—never would.

* * *

Saracen uprisings were always a worry for Christian Sicilians, and so the Normans in Sicily took steps to contain and control Muslim Sicilians. The riots that followed the death of William II were perhaps more worrisome because the collapse of central authority left few defenses to stand in the way of attacks on Christian Sicilians, but they were hardly unprecedented or even atypical. And it should be noted that Christian Sicilians posed an even more significant threat to Muslims. To prevent a repetition of such disturbances of the peace, Frederick deported Sicily’s Muslim subjects to the Italian mainland. But this was less a new policy than a strengthening of the Norman efforts to manage the state’s Arab population.

But the evolution of relations between Muslims and Christians in the

Sicilian state must be collated with the Sicilian monarchs' manipulation of Arabic and Islamic culture in order to produce a three dimensional portrait of Sicilian cultural history, and in particular, in the present context, in order to situate Sicilian literary history. The interregnum following the death of William II brought anarchy to the kingdom; cultural institutions (like social and economic institutions) fell into confusion. The strong Sicilian state that emerged under Frederick II represented a reconstruction—even a *translation* or a *strong reading*—of the institutions of the Norman state in Sicily, in the cultural context as well as the social or economic context. Thus we can read Lucera as a kind of “translation” of the Norman park. It functions as a space that quarantines and monumentalizes the culture of the Arabs, an Arab cultural preserve constructed specifically for the monarch’s enjoyment (and, in the case of Lucera, the monarch’s profit). Frederick’s containment of the Arab population of Sicily was so complete, finally, that he was forced to seek Jewish workers to tend the date palms of Palermo—the palms that had figured so centrally a century earlier, during the reign of Roger II, in al-Attabanishi’s celebration of the strength and unity of the Sicilian state.³⁰

The relative ease with which Frederick moved in Arab circles gave him an edge in international affairs, and he was quick to use it to his advantage. When, the pope having forced his hand, he finally reached the Holy Land, he communicated directly with the Arab governor of Jerusalem, and the pact he negotiated during that extraordinarily businesslike “crusade” left the mosques of the city under Muslim control. Certainly, despite his success in the Holy Land, his efforts there won him no friends in higher ecclesiastical circles. His pragmatic negotiations had nothing in common with the heroic exploits of the First Crusade and in fact only increased suspicions that Frederick was something of a fellow traveler to his Muslim business associates. Even popular opinion was quick to attribute to him an unhealthy tolerance of Muslims, both within Sicily and abroad, though the same sources were likely to dwell at length on the rumors of his uncomfortably intimate relations with Muslims, and one suspects that these tales provoked in their audience a not unpleasant frisson. Matthew of Paris—a chronicler sympathetic to Frederick—reports that people said that Frederick was more faithful to the law of Muhammad than of Jesus, was more a friend to Muslims than to Christians, and took Saracen whores as his concubines—“may God shun such a prince!”³¹ Such accusations of collusion between the Sicilian monarch and the Muslims would take a more vicious turn when Pope Clement IV declared the war for control of Sicilian lands against Frederick’s natural son, Manfredi, to be a crusade and promised that those who died in battle on Sicilian soil would

enjoy the same spiritual benefits as those who died in the Holy Land, on the grounds that Manfredi was in fact a Saracen.

But during Frederick's reign, Arabic culture was no longer a living, vivid presence in Sicily. Although it remained important, it was recast as a textual culture, created by importation and translation. Thus, for instance, having isolated the Arabs living within his kingdom, Frederick was obliged to hire professional (Christian) translators to Latinize Arabic scientific works. As further evidence of the diminution of Arabic literacy at the Sicilian court, Ibn Sab'in's secretary, in his reply to Frederick's philosophical questions, has occasion to point out grammatical errors in the Arabic text that reached him. These criticisms may be adduced as evidence that Frederick worked with a translator who spoke Arabic as an acquired language, or may even suggest that Frederick himself composed the questions, relying on the street Arabic he had learned as a boy in Palermo.³²

Though Sicilian culture was becoming increasingly Christianized and Latinized, the Sicilian monarch's efforts to preserve and exploit Arabic culture suggest that it still retained a measure of significance in Sicily (as well as, of course, strategic value in his international relations). The tarí, for instance—still an immensely popular coin with a wide circulation, its graphics made even more handsome during Frederick's reign—was stripped of its Arabic content following the death of Constance, Frederick's mother. The Norman era had seen an increasing elaboration of the coin's Arabic inscriptions. But under Frederick, the Arabic inscriptions on the coins were reduced to pseudo-Cufic, a graphic element devoid of linguistic valence. The tarí was inextricably bound with the memory of Arabic cultural fluency in Sicily, and Frederick was reluctant to allow that memory to fade from the Sicilian state's signature coin. Thus the coin preserved the *form* of its Arabic inscriptions, even when it no longer seemed important to convey *content* through the medium of Arabic.

Frederick's Norman ancestors treated the Arab cultural institutions they found in Sicily as a natural resource and drew on them in their own construction of a multilingual Sicilian culture. Frederick, in contrast, recognized the centrality of Arab culture to Sicilian cultural formations. But he did not seem to identify the culture of the Arabs with Arab Sicilians. Rather, he located it at a distance from his Sicilian kingdom—either a trace of the Norman past, a touchstone for his own revival of Sicilian culture, or a foreign culture, to be imported to his kingdom. His policy toward Arabs and Islamic culture efficiently translated the aspects of the culture that served him into a language that served him, while it contained and managed those Arab Sicilians

whom he identified as a source of trouble. Thus, during Frederick's reign, Arab culture shifted from being a living and productive culture to a textual culture, and the Arabic language, no longer a spoken tongue in Sicily, was made the object of translation. It would remain for the poets of Frederick's age to reconstruct Sicilian literary culture in this radically new terrain, and their first task would be to negotiate a new relationship with the language of culture.

4. Rereading *Le Origini*: Sicilian Romance Poetry and the Language of Natural Philosophy

“If, however, the contrariety and war in such a nature should act as one *more* stimulus and enticement to life—and if, on the other hand, in addition to powerful and irreconcilable drives, there has also been inherited and cultivated a proper mastery and subtlety in conducting a war against oneself, that is to say self-control, self-outwitting: then there arise those marvelously incomprehensible and unfathomable men, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and the seduction of others, the fairest examples of which are Alcibiades and Caesar (—to whom I should like to add that *first* European agreeable to my taste, the Hohenstaufen Friedrich II). . . .”

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #200

A REMARKABLY CHARISMATIC leader, Frederick II dramatized the tensions of his era and of the kingdom he ruled in his biography and in his very personality. His contests with the pope—his excommunications; his crusading victory in Jerusalem, so equivocally received in Rome—and his somewhat shady public image illustrate the cultural and political difficulties he faced with regard to contemporary Christian orthodoxy. At the same time, Frederick’s political, economic, and cultural successes in Sicily and abroad made him a figure to be celebrated and admired by contemporary intellectuals. Consider, for instance, Dante’s divergent responses to Frederick. In the context of cultural politics, Dante used Frederick as a symbol of cultural sophistication and patronage that other heads of state would do well to follow. Thus in his treatise on vernacular composition, the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante presents Frederick and his son Manfredi as men of intellect and discernment, the patrons and central organizing figures for the cultural life of the kingdom (*DVE* 1, xii, 4).¹ But in another context, when the governance of this world is not his primary concern, Dante is obliged to condemn Frederick. We meet the Sicilian king in canto 10 of the *Inferno*, among the Epicureans who deny the immortality of the soul. The heterodoxies of his character make it impossible for Dante to integrate him into the eschatological taxonomy of the *Commedia* anywhere but among the damned.

At the threshold of purgatory, among the saved, Dante will encounter another member of the Sicilian ruling family: Manfredi, whom Dante had named in the *De vulgari eloquentia* alongside Frederick as an exemplary cultural leader.

Manfredi was Frederick's natural son and one among a crowd of contenders for control of the Kingdom of Sicily after Frederick's death. His redemption in the *Purgatorio* comes as a shock. He had died excommunicate, exiled from the Christian community on the grounds that he was a Saracen by Pope Clement IV (who also granted the status of crusades to the struggles against Manfredi over control of Sicilian territories). The early commentary tradition reflects contemporary perceptions that Manfredi was a Saracen sympathizer or even a Saracen himself. Some of the commentators tell us, inaccurately, that Manfredi (not his father) created the Muslim city Lucera.² And L'Anonimo Fiorentino records a slur against Manfredi's character pronounced by a rival for control of the Sicilian territories, Charles of Anjou, who called Manfredi *sultayn de Nocere*—“sultan of Lucera.”³ But Dante tells us that at the moment of his death, Manfredi commended himself to “him who willingly forgives.” Thus, though his sins were grievous—“orribil furon li peccati miei” (*Purgatorio* III, 120–21)—and despite his excommunication, Manfredi was saved.

Walter Binni read this third canto of the *Purgatorio* as a meditation on “the complex and dialectical theme of communion and exclusion”:⁴ on the construction of a Christian community and the isolation of unbelief or heterodox belief, on the tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy within the Christian community. Manfredi's appearance forms the centerpiece of this meditation. As an excommunicate, Manfredi died in isolation from the community of Christian believers. Dante's redemption of him reverses the sentence of exclusion imposed on him by the pope, reintegrating Manfredi among a Christian elect. Dante further articulates Manfredi's position at the center of a meditation on community and exclusion through his careful disposition of members of the Sicilian royal family across the three canticles of the *Commedia*. He has already met Manfredi's father, Frederick, in the *Inferno*. In the *Paradiso*, he will encounter three more members of the Sicilian dynasty: Constance, Frederick's mother (and Manfredi's grandmother); Frederick's cousin, William II; and the Norman conqueror Robert Guiscard. We will not meet another family so carefully deployed among the three canticles of the *Commedia*, and it seems important to ask why Dante paid so much attention to his disposition of the Sicilian dynasty.

The encounter with Manfredi is pivotal to Dante's engagement with the Sicilian monarchs in the *Commedia* not only because of its centrality in Dante's chronological arrangement, but also because Manfredi is the only one of the Sicilian rulers with whom he speaks directly. In the course of his conversation with Dante, Manfredi relates the pathetic drama of his death and makes important statements about the power of the believer to earn his or her own redemption without the mediation of the church hierarchy. More interesting

in the current perspective—more enlightening in terms of Dante's engagement with the Kingdom of Sicily and the dynasty that ruled it—is the way that Manfredi chooses to trace his familial descent. "I am Manfredi," the soul says when Dante encounters him, "grandson of the Empress Constance; I pray that, when you return to the world, you go to my fair daughter, mother of the sovereigns of Sicily and Aragon, and tell her the truth about me" (*Purgatorio* III, 112–17). This daughter is another Constance, whom Manfredi will name in the closing lines of his speech to Dante, again asking the pilgrim to let her know that despite his excommunication Dante saw him among the saved. Manfredi positions himself between two Constances. In so doing he avoids mentioning Frederick. Manfredi had very good motives, of course, for eliding his father's name: he was an illegitimate child, and his father is in hell. But by choosing to trace his descent from Constance, Manfredi also highlights his Norman, rather than Swabian, inheritance. Manfredi's grandmother was the daughter of the great Norman monarch Roger II. When he identifies himself by naming her, Manfredi positions himself as the scion of the Norman rulers of Sicily.⁵

In the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante acknowledges the primacy of the Kingdom of Sicily in the field of Italian letters and places Manfredi and Frederick at the center of Sicilian literary life. Frederick—whose associations with Muslims and with Islamic culture earned him notoriety during his lifetime—was altogether too contentious a figure to be represented among the saved. Contemporaries associated Manfredi closely with his father and attributed the same civic and political virtues to each. Thus a thirteenth-century historian plays on his name to celebrate his paternal lineage: "And not without cause was he called *Manfredi*, as if he were *manens Frederico* (the *abiding* of Frederick); his father—now dead—lived in him, since the paternal strength could be seen to *abide* in him."⁶ But at the same time, Manfredi was less implicated in the heterodoxies that haunted his father. So Dante places him at the beginning of the *Purgatorio*, as a symbol of the role that political rulers play in constructing literary community. By creating a strong state and generating political unity the monarch creates an environment in which a unified literary tradition might emerge.

Thus, Manfredi is central not only to Dante's meditation on the role that the church plays in the construction of Christian community, but also to his consideration of literary community in the Italian context. Manfredi stands at the threshold of the *Purgatorio*, the canticle that sees Dante's most sustained interrogation of his poetic practice, or more precisely of his position in relation to literary history. His appearance (in *Purgatorio* III) immediately follows a tense scene in which Cato, the guardian of the entrance to

purgatory, chastises the souls who pause the progress of their purgation to listen to a musical performance of a love poem—a poem written, in fact, by Dante himself (*Purgatorio* II). Dante's positioning of Manfredi unexpectedly among the saved, following the emotional confrontation with Cato that calls into question the legitimacy of the vernacular love poetry which Dante himself wrote at the outset of his career, sets the tone for the investigations of vernacular poetry that will occupy him in the second canticle of the *Commedia*. The stereoscope portrait of Manfredi provided by his appearances in the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Commedia* evokes the construction of linguistic and poetic orthodoxy in an environment characterized by both cultural heterodoxies (witness Manfredi's condemnation as a Saracen, which Dante challenged by placing him in purgatory) and linguistic heterodoxies (see Dante's celebration of Manfredi as one of the central figures around whom a unified linguistico-literary tradition in Sicily coalesced).

Dante's reading of his Sicilian literary predecessors suggests a more complex view of that tradition than we usually find in modern literary histories. Modern scholars generally place the Sicilian poets' interventions in the context of a series of Romance poetic movements, as the last of the revolutionary vernacular movements of the Middle Ages. The Sicilian poets are typically depicted as translators. Their chief contribution to literary history is thought to be the invention of a language that could serve as a literary medium for the poets of the Italian peninsula and the translation of the conventions of lyric love poetry into that new literary language. There is some truth in this portrayal, but it overlooks the sorts of complexities that Dante's suggestive account of them embraces, placing them in the context of continental literary history and eliding their significance in the context of the cultural and literary history of the Kingdom of Sicily.

Frederick was heir to both Sicilian and Swabian titles, and his dual inheritance serves as another way to represent the complexity of his character. His reign began under the regency of the same Constance whom Manfredi names as his ancestor. His maternal bloodline bound him to insular history, to Sicily's past. Constance resisted the expansion of German power in Sicily, particularly following the death of her husband, Hohenstaufen Henry VI. By engaging the pope in Sicilian politics following Henry's death she counterbalanced the rise of German dominance in the realm. And it is significant that the signature coin of the Sicilian state, the tarí, bore genuine Arabic legends only until her death. During her regency, the coins gave Frederick's name in Arabic transliteration, and announced his title as "malik," or king. After Constance died the Arabic inscriptions became pseudo-Cufic design elements devoid of linguistic valence. Constance was the last of the full-blooded Normans to

hold power in Sicily, and also, apparently, the last of the Sicilian rulers able to manipulate Arabic as a medium for monarchic self-presentation.

After he attained his majority, Frederick traveled extensively in Germany in order to secure his power there. But following his return from Germany, he focused his energies as a ruler on his Sicilian territories, choosing to base himself in his Sicilian kingdom and to consolidate and strengthen his Sicilian state. As Dante's characterization of him in the *De vulgari eloquentia* suggests, Frederick was a canny and sophisticated man of culture. He not only observed and commented on the cultural life of his era, but also participated in it. In addition to the translations from the Arabic that he commissioned and the treatise on falconry that he composed, Frederick was also a poet.⁷ His cultural policy resulted in the reduction of the complexity of Sicilian culture; during his reign, Arabic literary production ceased, and Greek letters were drastically reduced. At the same time, however, Frederick remained conscious of the historical complexity of the Sicilian environment, and worked to maintain it on at least a symbolic and diplomatic level. If the literary historian of Sicily may at times feel a bit exasperated at the amount of attention granted to Frederick as arbiter of Sicilian culture—discussions of Sicilian Romance poetry typically take Frederick's career as their point of departure—still he or she must admit to a gratitude that the business of managing Sicilian culture fell into the hands of so capable a general, one so eager and so well equipped to engage in the internal cultural wars of his kingdom.

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With the exception of Roger II—who spent his youth in residences scattered throughout the island and during his mature years oversaw the conquest of continental territories on the Italian mainland—the Norman monarchs almost never left Palermo. The demands of conquest imposed a peripatetic lifestyle on the first generation of Siculo-Norman conquerors, Robert Guiscard and Count Roger, and they did little in the way of creating a cultural center of gravity for their Sicilian state. Nor did they have leisure to encourage the cultural niceties of court life in general, or literature in particular (other than historical works documenting their exploits). Roger II, Count Roger's son, was the first of the Norman rulers to pay attention to the literary life of his kingdom. Immediately after the end of his mother's regency (1101–11), Roger established a court at Palermo. And the cultural life of his Sicilian court embraced indigenous cultural traditions, rather than imposing a Franco-Norman cultural hegemony, as contemporary Norman conquerors did in Britain. The Normans in Sicily lacked a strong sentimental or cultural

tie to a home country. Their Sicilian state did not look back to a homeland as a cultural authority. Rather, they created a culturally self-sufficient state in Sicily. Nor was their capital, Palermo, a peripheral imitation of a home metropolis. It grew to become that central thing, a metropolis, itself—*al-Madina*, simply “the city,” for the Normans as it had been for the Arabs. And because of its layered ethnic and cultural makeup, because of its complex colonial history, it became an extraordinary center, an *off-center* center.

Unlike the Norman monarchs of Sicily, Frederick was notoriously—almost neurotically—peripatetic. At the age of four, when his mother died, he became a ward of Pope Innocent III and was passed off on a series of protectors. He spent his childhood on the island of Sicily, and it is to be presumed that he was not protected from the extraordinary cultural diversity and richness of the island. In 1208, at the age of fourteen, he attained his majority, and four years later he left on the first of his major journeys, for Germany. For the rest of his life, he followed a restless itinerary; even when he lived in Italy he wandered incessantly between cities.⁸

Three voyages were to have a particular importance for him, the first being his travels in Germany soon after he assumed the Sicilian throne. Pope Innocent III had handpicked him for election to the German throne, preferring him to Otto IV, whose ambitions on the Italian peninsula were not to Innocent's liking. Frederick spent eight years in his father's homeland, but chose finally to return to Sicily, to remain in Sicily, and to spend his prodigious energies renovating his Sicilian kingdom. “The German Henry VI,” Aurelio Roncaglia writes, “had treated Sicily as a land of conquest; Frederick, instead, aimed to reform a state that he felt to be *his* more even than Germany: the land of his earliest childhood, the inheritance of his mother and his Norman ancestors, whose court he strove to restore to its old splendor.”⁹ Next, in 1228, Frederick departed on crusade to Jerusalem. Frederick's journey delivered on a promise made some thirteen years earlier to Innocent. By the time he had completed preparations for the crusade, the current pope, Gregory IX—exasperated over Frederick's endless delay tactics and, of course, seeking political gain in southern Italy—had excommunicated him. Frederick proceeded to Jerusalem nevertheless. After negotiations with al-Kamil, the Ayyubid governor of Jerusalem, he gained possession of Jerusalem (with the exception of the major mosques, which Frederick left under Muslim control), Bethlehem, and Nazareth, along with access corridors to these cities. Frederick would maintain a friendly communication with al-Kamil and, following his death, al-Kamil's son, for the rest of his life. Finally, in the third of these formative voyages, in 1233–34 Frederick left his primary residences on the Italian peninsula and traveled in the island of Sicily. Many literary

historians believe that the activities of the Romance poets of Frederick's age, most of whom were native to the island, initiated in meetings with the monarch during these years.

During Frederick's reign—in distinction to the years of Norman domination in Sicily—there was no Sicilian metropolis, nor apparently a metropolitan culture. Palermo ceased to be a city of importance; Frederick's chief residences were on the mainland. Thus, the Sicilian poets—who demonstrate an extraordinary level of geographical self-consciousness, making reference to a number of insular cities (Lentini, Messina, Syracuse), peninsular geographic markers (Pisa, Florence, Bari, the river Agri, Tuscany), and foreign locales (Syria; “*Lamagna*,” or Germany)—make no mention of Palermo.¹⁰ Rather than a metropolis, rather than a court that served as a physical or geographical center for the cultural life of his kingdom, Frederick presided over a kind of city of letters: not an “off-center center,” but rather a *decentered* center. Roncaglia notes the “mobility” and “polycentrism” of Frederick's government, and points out that in the absence of a physical center, Frederick's decentered state required a rigorously organized and monitored corps of bureaucrats to carry out the business of the court. And Furio Brugnolo, in one of the most perceptive recent studies of the Sicilian poets, points out the difference between the geophysical organization of the Sicilian Magna Curia and the typical courts of the Middle Ages. In Sicily the term “court” signified not a physical center, but rather the “complex of offices” that conducted the business of the state, “an apparatus of court functionaries and dignitaries.”¹¹

The peripatetic nature of Frederick's court imposed on it a certain textual sophistication. The cultural life of the Kingdom of Sicily during Frederick's reign was not centered in a geographic location; it was centered on the page. It was a court of the mind, of the will. All states (as Nietzsche would remind us) are a product of the human intellect and human will. But the Sicilian Curia made particular demands on the faculties of its courtiers, both because it possessed an extraordinary cultural complexity and because it lacked a physical center. In the absence of a capital city, in the absence of established cultural forms, in the absence even of a unified linguistic tradition to serve as the basis of literary culture, the Sicilian environment called forth an extraordinary level of activity from its men of letters. Sicilian poets responded by inventing a new literary tongue—an innovation welcomed by the poets of the Italian peninsula, who would naturalize the Sicilians' language and use it as a medium for their own poetic compositions.

In order to understand the remarkable nature of the Sicilian poets' act of linguistic creation, it is necessary to recall that just a generation earlier, at the time of the death of William II (1189), the literary language of the Kingdom

of Sicily had been Arabic. The interregnum between William's death and Frederick's ascent to the throne had thrown the kingdom—and its cultural institutions in particular—into anarchy. Frederick's Sicilian kingdom revived the institutions of the Norman kingdom; few of these institutions, however, remained unchanged. Thus, for instance, the Edicts of Messina, formulated in 1221, confirmed the legal code of Norman Sicily while introducing substantial changes. The preface to this document displays a keen awareness of its historical situation. It evokes the disorder of the kingdom at the time the constitution was produced—"the Kingdom of Sicily has been wounded by the assaults of previous disturbances, on account of the debility of our times, and on account of our own absence [from the realm]." And it affirms the continuity of the laws that it presents with the laws of the Norman era: "we order that the decrees of the previous kings of Sicily (which we rule are to be preserved), as well as our own, are to be upheld throughout the land."¹²

Most importantly from a literary-historical point of view, Frederick's reign saw the reduction of Sicilian culture to a monolingual culture and the emergence of a vernacular poetic tradition in Sicily. During the thirteenth century the Curia did not release its documents in Arabic, and—although significant pronouncements, such as the Edicts of Messina for instance, were redacted in Greek as well as Latin—it did not regularly produce Greek versions of its laws and pronouncements. However, plurilingual cultural affiliations remained important in Sicily. Frederick employed Arabic and Hebrew translators; Greek poets addressed panegyrics to the Sicilian monarch. And the Romance poets of Sicily wrote with a keen awareness of earlier Occitan, French, and German poetic traditions. But whereas in Norman Sicily three linguistico-literary traditions had converged, now one tradition had taken precedence, eclipsing the others. Frederick's contemporaries celebrated his court for its cultural and linguistic complexity and in particular for its ability to negotiate between the intellectual traditions of the Muslim and Christian worlds, and modern historians continue to emphasize this aspect of Sicilian cultural life during his reign. But, although cultural and linguistic plurality remained a reality in Sicily, the historian must acknowledge one substantial difference between thirteenth-century plurilingualism and the plurilingualism of the Norman era. During Frederick's reign, Arabic was no longer a living language in Sicily; it had become a language of translation. The balance of linguistic and literary traditions achieved during the years of Norman domination in Sicily collapsed when the Norman government collapsed. Romance culture was able to achieve hegemony because the drop in Arabic literacy left a void in the field of literary production that must be filled.

For this reason, the emergence of a monolingual literary culture should

be read as the shadow of Sicilian plurilingualism. The growing dominance of Latino-Romance culture in Sicily encouraged the emergence of an indigenous vernacular tradition on Italian soil (though the relation of the Sicilian language and the Sicilian literary tradition to the vernaculars and the vernacular literatures of peninsular Italy presents complexities that remain to be discussed). So Frederick's Sicily completed the cultural project begun by the Normans: the establishment of an autonomous culture at once uniquely Sicilian and responsive to the innovations introduced by mainland European states. Norman culture—for all the stunning monuments it left behind—was a short-lived and finally unsuccessful experiment. It produced remarkable achievements in the area of architecture and a disparate handful of striking literary works. But it was not able to generate a vital literary tradition. During Frederick's era, finally, the literature of the Kingdom of Sicily came into its maturity. Sicilian poets delivered on the promises implicit in the cultural experimentation of the Norman era. It is a stubborn, though entirely unsubstantiated, Sicilian belief that the Romance poets of Frederick's era traced their literary patrimony to the literary traditions of Arab Sicily. Thus, for instance, Vincenzo Consolo reports that the Sicilian poets of the age of Frederick II wrote “in a language that was plurilingual, in which there were echoes of the Arabic language. But above all the style of those poets was Arabic: a lyric style, a bit manneristic, in the construction of complicated metaphors.” And Francesca Maria Corrao ends the preface to her handsome edition of Sicilian Arabic poetry—for which she invited Sicilian poets to compose Italian translations—with a balanced and sensitive account of the difficulty of adducing an Arabic influence on the Romance poets of the thirteenth century. And yet she cannot resist the temptation to tantalize the reader by citing the “allitterazioni arabeggianti” (the *arabicizing alliterations*) of a sonnet by the Sicilian Romance poet Giacomo da Lentini.¹³ Though no literary evidence supports the supposition of genetic relations between Arabic and Romance poetry in Sicily, the poets of Arab Sicily did in a certain sense help to engender a Sicilian Romance literary tradition: first by existing, and creating a precedent for literary production in Sicily; and then by ceasing to exist.

* * *

It is generally believed that the Sicilian poets' activities began at the time of Frederick's visit to the island of Sicily in 1233–34.¹⁴ This theory implies that Frederick had a direct hand in the poets' activities, perhaps somehow legislating the movement into existence—a suggestion that may appear problematic, or even irksome, to some literary historians, though we would be wrong

to discount it for that reason alone. Certainly, a high percentage of the Sicilian poets of the first generation were from the island of Sicily, rather than the mainland half of the kingdom. And although surviving biographical details are paltry, a significant number of them seem to have had direct access to the monarch.¹⁵ This access to the emperor—who, Dante suggests, played a motivating role in the emergence of the Sicilian movement—may be one of the factors behind the remarkable coherence of that movement. Although the Kingdom of Sicily lacked a physical center, a *court* in the technical sense of the word, nevertheless the poets of the realm formed a well-defined social unit, linked by their affiliation with each other in contemporary sources and their apparent awareness of each other's work. And they evidence a shared literary sensibility, marked by the presence of themes and trends that grants the corpus of their work a striking continuity.

The Sicilian poets' contemporaries and near contemporaries identified them as a group and linked them closely to the figure of the Sicilian king. Dante's discussion of them in the *De vulgari eloquentia* makes their association with the Sicilian royal family clear. The Sicilians were the first to compose poetry in an Italianate vernacular, a fact that Dante attributes to the magnetism of Frederick and Manfredi, whose "nobility and rectitude" made them central, unifying figures for a community of poets (*DVE* I, xii, 4). And his citation of Giacomo da Lentini as first among his literary ancestors, in the context of his discussion of his own poetic patrimony in the *Purgatorio* (XXIV, 56), is indicative of the tendency to identify Giacomo as *caposcuola* for the group as a whole. The propensity to view the Sicilian poets as a distinct and coherent cohort, and to place Giacomo at the head of this group, is duplicated in the organization of the major medieval manuscript preserving the Sicilians' poems. The *canzoniere* known as Vaticano Latino 3793—a collection of early Italian poetry, now in the Vatican collection, that culminates with Dante and the poets of his age—begins with a selection of Sicilian works, and that selection itself begins with a poem by Giacomo that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Giacomo's precedence among the Sicilians is granted also by the large number of his poems that have been preserved, and the consistently high quality of those poems. If indeed—as literary historians generally assume—he is to be identified as the innovator among the Sicilians, the poet who introduced the movement's major departures from literary convention, then it certainly follows (as Furio Brugnolo points out) that the other Sicilian poets responded to his innovations more directly than, for instance, the Occitan poets responded to the first of the troubadours, William IX.¹⁶ Indeed, the Sicilians seem to have known each other's works and to have responded

directly to them to an extraordinary degree by citing and playing on felicitous turns of phrase in each other's poems.¹⁷ The coherence of the Sicilian poets as a group results in part from the relatively brief historical moment and relatively contained geographical space in which they worked. Whether or not their activities were directly inspired by the presence and the encouragement of Frederick II, it appears that a first cohort of poets began writing at roughly the same moment and in roughly the same place. The inception of the Sicilian poetic movement must have been a time of intense literary ferment, during which a finite number of poets, coming from a finite geographical area, introduced a dynamic series of poetic interventions—including, first and foremost, the invention of a new literary language.

The conceptual and formal integrity of the poets' work may also result in part from their position in relation to continental literary history. The Sicilian poets wrote *after* the major poetic avant-gardes had already transformed the literary map, after poets composing in Occitan, French, and German had mounted a radical challenge to the Latin literary tradition. For this reason, the Sicilian poetic movement was essentially a reactionary movement. The Sicilians accepted the substance of the literary inventions of previous vernacular poets. At the same time, they fine-tuned innovations introduced by others, and some of their modifications would be of decisive importance. They did not write ethical or political poetry, as their predecessors writing in the *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl* had done. They reduced the lyric poet's portfolio to a single theme: the love situation and its psychological ramifications. They used the love poem as a vehicle for scientific meditation, integrating the language of natural philosophy in general and physiology in particular into their discussions of the lover's predicament. They divorced lyric poetry from musical presentation; it appears that their poetry was conceived to be read, not performed musically. Unlike the troubadours, the Sicilians were not professional poets and performers, but intellectuals or court functionaries who also wrote poetry. The most important innovation introduced by the Sicilians, from a broader literary historical perspective, was the invention of a new prosodic form—the sonnet. Roberto Antonelli refers to a “strong—even prevalent—attention to modernity, but a consciousness of the ‘classical’” that is a keynote of Sicilian poetic composition.¹⁸ The Sicilians’ keen awareness of the literary history that preceded them, and their willingness to experiment with received traditions, grants their work a certain sophistification and even, for the late modern reader, an immediacy. The postmoderns of the premodern world, Sicilian poets remained conscious of their position as manipulators of the received innovations of other poets and at times performed that role with relish.

It is in part in recognition of the coherence of the Sicilian movement—the fact that the poets seem to have emerged from a relatively small geographic area, during a relatively condensed historical moment, and that they seem to agree on a general modification or limitation of received poetic conventions—that the poets have earned the title “scuola siciliana.” The name, introduced by literary historian Adolfo Gaspary in a study published in 1882, suggests the formal and thematic integrity of the poets’ work; alludes to their close links to the Sicilian monarch; and finally imputes a certain dryness, a scholarly (or even scholastic) quality to their work. However, it does not convey the dynamic reading of literary history undertaken by the poets, and it certainly glosses over the extraordinary historical and geographical situation of the Sicilian poets’ activities. In recent years scholars have begun to resist the name and its attendant connotations or to use it with a more profound awareness of the source and the nuances of the designation.¹⁹

The surviving oeuvre of the leading poet of the Sicilian movement, Giacomo da Lentini, is by far the largest of the Sicilian poets; it is large enough that it allows us to perceive the development of certain trends in Sicilian poetics. It is precisely in his briefest and most structurally demanding poetry—the sonnets—that Giacomo makes the greatest effort to extend himself intellectually. In much the same way, the Sicilian poets in general launch their most dynamic innovations in the *limitations* of the received poetic tradition they introduce. When the linguistic palette of Sicilian poetry is reduced to a single language; when the poets restrict themselves to love poetry, rejecting other subjects (panegyric, and indeed political or ethical poetry of any kind; comic poetry); when they reject the top-heavy formal requirements of more complex prosodic forms and reduce their repertoire to a single form, the *canzone*, the Sicilians achieve their most dynamic interventions in contemporary literary history.

Scholars have assumed that Giacomo himself invented the sonnet for two reasons. First, far more sonnets survive by Giacomo than by any other writer. And second, Giacomo appears to be the most sophisticated and most ambitious of the Sicilian poets, and thus presents himself as the most likely candidate for the role of literary inventor. There is no agreement about the genesis of the form. It appears to have sprung fully formed from Giacomo’s pen. Already, in the sonnets written by Giacomo and his contemporaries, certain fundamental formal elements are clearly present: the hendecasyllabic lines; the thematic division of the poem into two quatrains and two tercets; the introduction and elaboration of a problem in the first octave and its resolution in the concluding tercets. Some have argued—though it must be said that their arguments do not strike one as particularly coherent or convincing—

that the sonnet evolved from a popular Arabic poetic form. Others have proposed that the Sicilians derived it from a popular Sicilian Romance poetic form, the *strambotto*. And some scholars speculate that the sonnet is a truncation of the *canzone*.²⁰ Given the thinness of the literary record, given the mystery that seems to attend the birth of most literary forms during the pre-modern era, it seems unlikely that we will ever reach a fuller understanding of the genesis of the form. Indeed, discovering the origin of the sonnet is a grail that has become less compelling to literary scholars, as origins studies themselves have come to seem less important. A consideration of the particular role that the new prosodic form played in the Sicilians' poetics presents a more fruitful object of scholarly attention.

The sonnet furnished a magnificent vehicle for one of the central Sicilian preoccupations: the articulation of the love poem as a medium for scientific or philosophical meditation. Consider, for instance, the discussions of the thermodynamics of love in Giacomo's sonnets "Si como 'l parpaglion ch' à tal natura" ("Like the moth, which has such a nature"); or "Chi non avesse mai veduto foco" ("Whoever has never seen fire"). In these poems, Giacomo argues that the lady's beauty is like a fire: alluring and attractive, but destructive. The lover is drawn irresistibly to her, like a moth to a flame, only to be annihilated by the very beauty that seduced him. Other poets would use fire imagery in order to illustrate the lover's plight. Thus, for instance, Rinaldo d'Aquino's *canzone* "Amorosa donna fina" ("Amorous and refined lady") begins by evoking the destructive fire of love: "it is no marvel if the fire of love scorches me when I look at your face, for love has consumed me in flames." This fairly banal reference to the fire of love in the opening stanza blooms into a complex and lovely image later in the poem, when the poet tells his lady that she has set him on fire, but the fire is covered with snow; it can't be seen, but illuminates the snow, burning within the ice.²¹

In a series of sonnets, Giacomo uses optical theory to enliven his discussion of the love situation: "Sì come il sol che manda la sua spera" ("Just like the sun, which sends its beam"); "Lo viso mi fa andare alegramente" ("Her face sends me forth happy"); "Eo viso e son diviso da lo viso" ("I see, although I am distant from the thing seen"). Giacomo is at his liveliest and most sparkling when he uses optical theory to distinguish between phenomena and (visual or emotional) perception of those phenomena. The *canzone* "Maravigliosamente" describes the internal image of the lady that the poet carries in his heart. The poet likens himself to a painter and differentiates between the sophisticated but woefully inadequate portrait he creates of the lady and the infinite superiority of the lady herself. The sonnet "Or come pote sì gran donna intrare" ("Now how can so large a woman enter") is a

delightful meditation on the conceptual difficulty of formulating an optical theory that can account for a truism of love poetry: that the perceived image of the lady can enter so diminutive an aperture as the eye and then reside in so small a receptacle as the heart. The poet's resolution of the problem makes it clear that he is familiar with state of the art optical theory. The lady's image—like the light of a fire—sends forth its “luster,” which enters the eye without rupturing it and then passes to the poet's heart. Giacomo draws on the theory of perception put forward by Averroes, known as intromission, which holds that visual stimuli impose their forms on the perceiver's eye.²²

In another sonnet, “Diamante nè smiraldo nè zafino” (“Neither diamond nor emerald nor sapphire”), Giacomo uses lapidary images as a centerpiece for his meditation on the love situation and on his beloved. These citations function as exotic coloring, catalogues of exotic treasures meant to enhance the poem's formal beauty. The Sicilians were fond of using both lapidary and, in particular, bestiary images as ornament: to represent the beloved's beauty, for instance, or her savage lack of regard for the lover. Thus, for instance, the bestiary images in the two surviving compositions by Stefano Protonotaro, “Pir meu cori allegrari” (“In order to delight my heart”) and “Assai mi placeria” (“It would give me much delight”), serve to dress up a rather typical tale of hapless lover trumped by haughty lady.

In another poem, however, Giacomo seems to be doing something more with lapidary images. His *canzone* “Amor non vole” (“Love does not wish”) describes in detail the difficulty of his position as a Sicilian poet. He admits the exhaustion of the genre of amorous poetry: “there are so many lovers,” he writes, that love “has lost its taste from overuse” (vv. 18–20). Other poets, writing in other tongues, have sung all the joys and the pains of love. What strategy remains for the lover who wishes to describe his condition with conviction, who wishes to say something new? Giacomo does not map out a solution to the problem. Rather, he broods on the love situation and on his own activities as a poet: what might be termed the *writerly* situation of the love poet, who performs his passion for a literary audience.²³ His discussion pivots upon two descriptions of gemstones placed at the heart of the poem. “Every gem that is more rare,” he writes, “is held to be more precious” (vv. 21–22); and he introduces an image of a jewel that is rarer and thus more precious: “if it is Oriental, the sapphire is worth that much more, though it has less power” (vv. 25–27). In the following stanza, he holds up the turquoise as an example of a gemstone that has been cheapened by age and overfamiliarity: “Cheapened are the turquoises of that remembered age” (vv. 31–32).²⁴

From the Oriental sapphire—valued for its exoticism, even when it is of lesser quality—to the turquoise, no longer as exquisite as it once was: Giacomo's

decadent gestures of exhaustion read like a fin-de-siècle sigh, mitigated by the vigor of his poetic diction. The gemstones that he uses as examples of diminished value, however, merit a closer look. The “Oriental” sapphire serves as a sly reminder of the cultural complexities of the Sicilian poet’s homeland: its proximity to the intellectual and material treasures of the East, and its history as an Arab state. The “Orient”—like Sicily itself, which was so close to the Orient, which was in fact at moments indistinguishable from the Orient, from the perspective of the Christian West—was object of both desire and fear for Christians of Giacomo’s age. In this context, Giacomo’s gesture of dismissal—“if it is Oriental, the sapphire is worth that much more, though it has less power”—does double duty. It serves to remind us of Giacomo’s privileged access to the lionized treasures of the Orient as well as to undercut the perceived value of the East, to create allure even as it is dismissed.

Giacomo’s turquoise is denser than his sapphire, and requires some unpacking for full appreciation. Antonino Pagliaro, writing in the 1950s, solved a puzzle that had troubled modern readers by finally identifying the gem that Giacomo describes in these lines. The word that Giacomo uses—“scolosmini”—was unfamiliar to scholars. Pagliaro pointed out that it is related to the Armenian word for turquoise, and its spelling suggests that it was transliterated and transmitted through the Arabic alphabet. Furthermore, Pagliaro traced Giacomo’s notion that the color and quality of the turquoise can degenerate with time, unfamiliar in Christian Europe, to the Arabic lapidary tradition.²⁵ Once these technical difficulties are resolved, however, the reader is still left with a difficulty. “Cheapened are the turquoises of that remembered age”: what is the remembered age to which Giacomo links the gem? Most obviously, Giacomo alludes to the era of the poets who have written before him, who have exhausted the strategies the poet might use to praise his beloved, just as time exhausts the beauty of the turquoise. At the same time, with the echo of the Oriental sapphire still ringing in his ear, the reader would recall the age of Arab cultural domination in Sicily—still fresh in Sicilian memory at the time Giacomo wrote—when “Oriental” sources provided not only the gemstones themselves, but also the names by which they were known and reference works for learning about their qualities:

Cheapened are the turquoises
Of that remembered age
That were so fair and precious—
But no pleasure was found in them.

The author of one of the earliest studies of the Sicilian Romance poets called “Amor non vole” a “manifesto” of Sicilian poetics.²⁶ We may take issue

with the anachronism of this statement. The poem seems more an expression of succulent literary exhaustion than a cry for renewed poetic production; at one point, Giacomo calls (tongue firmly in cheek, it is true) for a nine-year moratorium on the writing of love poetry. But at the same time, it is clear that Giacomo's aim is to delineate the boundary between the age in which he writes (*modernity*, as Antonelli terms it) and the past. That past may be identified, at one moment, as the generations of Romance love poets that preceded the Sicilians. At the same time, Giacomo represents the past that haunts and overshadows him with images that are clearly marked as "Oriental." In the central stanzas of Giacomo's "manifesto," Sicily's history as a state bridging the Muslim and Christian worlds—exemplified by the giddy hybridity of Norman cultural production—is at once valued and degraded, like the Oriental sapphire, which the poet both celebrates and dismisses.

* * *

The Sicilian poets occupied an extraordinary place in Sicilian cultural history. They wrote traditional lyric love poetry in a newly minted literary language that they had invented for the purpose, a literary form of the Romance vernacular spoken in a region where just a generation earlier poets had written in Arabic. And their position in the continuity of continental literary history was equally striking. Their activities followed the great age of literary revolutions; they wrote after the major poetic avant-gardes had already transformed the literary-historical map. They were acutely aware of their position vis-à-vis continental poetic history, as Giacomo's references to literary history in "Amor non vole" demonstrate. Canny evidence of their near contemporaries' perception of the Sicilian poets' manipulation of received literary traditions is preserved in an important manuscript of early Italian verse. The manuscript, Vaticano Latino 3793, begins with a selection of Sicilian poets. And that preamble itself opens with Giacomo's translation of an Occitan poem by troubadour Folchetto di Marsiglia: "Madonna dir vi voglio" ("My lady, I wish to tell you"; from Folchetto's "A vos, midontç, voill retrair'en cantan" ["My lady, I wish to tell you in song"]). The Sicilians' translations from the Occitan—in addition to Giacomo's reworking of a troubadour model, Jacopo Mostacci, in "Umile core e fino e amoroso" ("A heart humble and fine and loving"), translates an anonymous poem, "Longa sazon ai estat vas amor" ("Long have I been with regard to love"), and a number of Sicilian poems translate isolated stanzas of Occitan exemplars—were the only formal poetic translations produced in medieval Europe. They stand as further evidence of the Sicilians' keen awareness of literary history and their aggressive readings of that history.²⁷

Dante's treatment of the Sicilians in his *De vulgari eloquentia* would consolidate the understanding of the Sicilian poets as the translators of continental poetic traditions for an Italian audience. Dante identified the Sicilians as the originators of the Italian literary tradition and the creators of a literary language that would find its greatest champions in the poets of Dante's own generation (see below, pp. 116–17). On the one hand, it is ironic that, in his discussion of Sicilian poetics, Dante chose to celebrate first the Sicilian *court*, when in Sicily it is not at all apparent that there was anything like a court, at least not in the most basic and tactile sense of the word. But on the other, the qualities that Dante identified with Sicily did not require a physical center—a capital city, a royal palace, a “court.” What Dante celebrated was primarily the Promethean act of creation that generated a monolingual culture in a region that previously had been characterized by plurilingualism. The *De vulgari eloquentia*, after all, tells a story similar to the one I am telling here, although his tale does not have an ending: much of his treatise catalogues the dialects spoken on the Italian peninsula, searching without success for a tongue that can serve as a single, unifying literary language for all Italian poets. The sense of coherence around the central figure of the monarch in Sicily might have provided the centripetal force behind the generation of a literary language in Sicily; Dante himself would ultimately serve the same function for the poets of Italy.

The Sicilians seem to have had a more than passing familiarity with the works of the troubadours and to have known as well the French epic tradition and the Minnesängers. Their manipulation of those traditions—the poetic innovations they introduced—served not to broaden but rather to restrict a poetic field of play: they were, in a sense, miniaturists. They limited the canon of poetic forms they inherited from previous generations of poets, writing mainly *canzoni*, along with a handful of discords. They reduced the topic of poetry to a single subject: love, and its psychological and physiological ramifications. They seem to have conceived their poetry to be read without musical accompaniment. But these reductions, these miniaturizations of a poetic tradition, made possible new departures. The Sicilians reconfigured the love poem as a vehicle for meditation on natural philosophy. And they invented a new prosodic form, the sonnet, which was ideally suited for interrogation of both amatory and philosophical questions, and not dependent on musical accompaniment to enliven its rhythmic or prosodic structures.

In recognition of their historical position with relation to the other vernacular poetic movements of the Middle Ages, their obvious awareness of those movements, and their willingness to play with received traditions, literary historians tend to see them in the shadow of those previous poets. In

the past, the Sicilians have sometimes been regarded as (mere) translators. This account of Sicilian literary history, however, downplays the radical force of their recognition of the derivative nature of their poetry. The Sicilian poets were the first of the Romance vernacular poets to write with a self-conscious awareness of their position in vernacular literary history. That is, they (not Dante) were the first Romance poets to treat their field of play as a genre with a history.

Furthermore, a reading of the Sicilians' poetics that situates them as the translators of continental literary traditions, and overlooks their role as the mediators and translators of the immediate and more problematic cultural formations of the twelfth-century Kingdom of Sicily, does not do full justice to their activities on a literary and a broader cultural stage. The historical moment that the Sicilian Romance poets occupied was balanced between diversity—the most productive cultural diversity of the moment, Muslim-Christian cultural contact—and cultural consolidation, with its attendant reduction of cultural diversity. Finally, the most striking continuity between this last period in the brief history of the Kingdom of Sicily and the Norman centuries that preceded it lies in its denouement of the tensions between literary culture and linguistic complexity. The emphasis on integration of discrete cultural traditions under the aegis of a single, powerful monarch was not lost during the reign of Frederick II. But it was modified by a number of connected cultural trends: the reduction of Arabic cultural production, the increasing Latinity of Sicilian culture, and the emergence of a vernacular tradition as an embellishment of that Latinate culture. Frederick's age saw the end game of the "war against oneself" in Sicilian culture that Nietzsche lauds in the figure of Frederick himself. The emperor, with his appetite for knowledge and his ability to negotiate between Muslim and Christian cultural spheres, embodied the cultural struggles of his kingdom, battles that ended with the eradication of the state's Muslim population and the ascendance of a Latinate culture.

During the decades of high modernity, the Sicilian Romance poets of the thirteenth century were regarded as poorer cousins of their revolutionary predecessors and heirs. An era that celebrated the revolutionary urge in artistic creation, and the agonistic champion among artistic creators, would naturally feel a stronger attraction to the iconoclasm of French epic and Occitan lyric and the stunning metaphysical stylings of the Italian *dolce stil novo* movement. But the Sicilian poets may be a better fit for postmodern tastes. Giacomo's awareness of his literary past—detailed, painstaking, at times giddy, at times simply pained—suits a sensibility that is more likely to view iconoclasm as historical naïveté than to laud it. Yet, though Giacomo clearly views

the past as an inescapable burden, he attempts simultaneously to differentiate his era from those that preceded it. Giacomo's aim in "Amor non vole" is to articulate his relation to the past—a past that he associates with both the lyric poets of Christian Europe and Arab cultural dominance in Sicily. At the center of the poem he sets two lapidary references with "Oriental" resonance, at one moment praising them as uniquely valuable, and tossing them aside as mere trinkets in the next.

Both summoning and distancing the past, Giacomo gains a certain control over it. He makes unruly history into something that can be *written*: catalogued, understood, mastered, and transcended. What he as a Sicilian poet must transcend is not only literary history, but also the history of his own homeland. Other poets had already launched the vernacular revolution; now, the poet must negotiate his way through a literary terrain cluttered with accomplishment. So, too, as a Sicilian Giacomo must position himself in relation to the past. Sicily grew into a powerful Mediterranean state under the shadow of Arab cultural domination. In order to move out from that shadow, the Sicilian poet must (as the Sicilian monarch did) take possession of Sicily's riches and its history, retaining those parts of the past that were of use and rejecting those perceived as cheap or perilous. In "Amor non vole," Giacomo undertakes a project of recuperation that is balanced—on a much grander scale—by one of Frederick II's most ambitious cultural renovations: the Muslim ghetto town of Lucera.

5. Beyond *Le Origini*: Sicilian Romance Poetry in a Feminine Voice

THE AUTHORS OF THE EARLIEST modern studies of Sicilian Romance poetry found the poets' most unique contribution in the poetry that they wrote in the voice of a woman. These literary historians deemed the majority of the Sicilians' works to be derivative, following the trends established by earlier French and, in particular, Occitan poets. But a unique freshness, immediacy, and vivacity characterized the poetry in the voice of a woman, they argued. And they asserted that these poems derived their vitality from their proximity to the spoken language, that when the Sicilians abandoned the lofty register of their more learned compositions—like the poems citing natural philosophy discussed in the last chapter—they produced their most original works.¹

Certainly, the works in the voice of a woman differ dramatically from the poetry inspired by natural philosophy. Consider, for instance, an anonymous composition, “*Oi lassa ’namorata*” (“Oh forlorn and in love”), in which a woman catalogues her (rather pedestrian) complaints in a disarmingly fresh tone. She has been loved and abandoned by a man who swore his devotion to her and then left her for another, and she both affirms her undying love and laments the perfidiousness of her lover. In the closing stanza, in which she formally sends her poem off to its recipient, she addresses specific directions to the poem:

Go, fine song,
to the lucky man [i.e., her lover];
wound him in his heart
if you find him disdainful.
Don’t wound him violently—
that would be too grievous—
but wound her who holds him,
kill her without fail!¹²

It is difficult to resist the charm of these lines. Where the loftier compositions of the Sicilian poets use a restrained tone and a refined vocabulary to sing the pleasures and the torments of love to a schooled audience, here the beloved weaponizes her song. The clarity of her *canzonetta fina*—her “fine song”—becomes an instrument for exacting vengeance for the wrongs done to her, and winning back her lover (after inflicting an appropriate punishment) for herself.

The Romance poetry written in Sicily during the thirteenth century poses a number of difficult literary historical problems. The Sicilian movement followed the major poetic avant-gardes of the Middle Ages. Rather than viewing it as an innovative departure from tradition—a revolutionary poetic movement whose new language and new spirit differentiates it from the Latin literary tradition of the past—the literary historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically saw the Sicilian poetry as an imitative translation of the innovations of previous poets. And they used the poetry in the voice of a woman to answer one of the most intractable questions about Sicilian poetics: What in it is truly original, and hence distinctly Sicilian? No Romance culture existed in Sicily before the arrival of the Normans. And the Normans apparently brought little of their own Franco-Norman literary culture with them. These bare facts dictated the standard narrative of Sicilian literary history: literary historians speculated that a cohort of relatively recent arrivals—the Italian speakers who came to Sicily during the years of Norman rule—grafted a Romance literary tradition onto a Sicilian stock. The bulk of the Sicilian poetry, according to the traditional literary historical narrative, simply translated conventional images and sentiments from the French and Occitan vernacular traditions into an Italianate vernacular. But in the poetry in the voice of a woman the historians heard something qualitatively different. The celebration of Sicilian poetry in a feminine voice responded to the desire to find a recognizably Sicilian sensibility in Sicilian Romance poetry, an indigenous voice that counterbalanced the artificial, studied tone typical of much of the Sicilian corpus. Literary historians did not look beyond *le origini* to seek an indigenous Sicilian source or indigenous inspiration for the Romance movement for a simple reason: that would entail tracing the Romance poetry to an Arabic origin.

* * *

It is true that an extraordinary freshness of diction characterizes the poetry in the voice of a woman. And the vitality of the poetry encourages the modern reader to view these works as “popularizing” poems that draw on the particularities of a regional spoken language rather than on the transnational vocabulary of amorous vernacular poetry. Many of these poems (such as “*Oi lassa ’namorata*”) are anonymous or of dubious attribution, suggesting that they are the work of nonprofessional poets. But some of the most prominent Sicilian poets also wrote compositions in a feminine voice. And in these works, because they can be contrasted to the poet’s compositions in a normative masculine voice, the emotive difference that the feminine voice makes,

even a *fictional* feminine voice, becomes obvious. The poetic “I” speaks with a simple and straightforward tone, a forthrightness that at times feels plaintive. But at the same time—we are, after all, reading the work of an accomplished poet—a polished and calculated structure counterbalances the simplicity and directness of diction, and an elegant and controlled style mitigates the lady’s claims of powerlessness and lack of control. Thus, for instance, in Rinaldo d’Aquino’s “Già mai non mi conforto” (“Never will I be comforted”), a woman stands in the harbor watching a fleet of ships preparing to depart on crusade and sings a pathetic and affecting farewell to her lover who is aboard one of them. The central three stanzas of the poem name three agents responsible for her lover’s departure and her distress:

Holy, holy, holy God,
 Who came to the Virgin,
 Save and keep my love,
 Since you have taken him away from me.
 Oh high power,
 Reverenced and feared,
 May my sweet love
 Be commended to your safekeeping!

The cross saves the people—
 And it is my undoing.
 The cross is the source of my pain,
 And my prayers to God do me no good.
 O pilgrims’ cross,
 Why have you destroyed me?
 Poor wretched me—
 I am all in flames!

The Emperor rules
 All the world in peace—
 And on me he makes war,
 For he has taken away my hope.
 Oh high power,
 Reverenced and feared,
 May my sweet love
 Be commended to your safekeeping!³

Note the ascending tone of accusation in these three stanzas: in the first, the lady complains timidly to God for taking her lover away from her. In the second she chastises the cross, the symbol of the crusaders’ mission and of their difference from the Muslim monotheists they would battle in the Holy Land. And in the third, she rails against the emperor, whom she holds

personally responsible for her unhappiness. The lady articulates an acute reading of the forces behind the crusade that has taken her lover away from her. It is launched in God's name, under the sign of the cross, and at the will of the emperor. Particularly striking is the repetition of the final four verses in the first and last stanzas cited. The lady addresses the same apostrophe and the same prayer to God and the emperor. This poem—though it is a lovely composition, direct and engaging in its language—is preserved in only one manuscript. The lady's outspoken criticism of Frederick, the unnamed emperor, and the rather shocking repetition of the same phrases in her appeals to him and to God, may explain the relative occlusion of the poem in the manuscript tradition.

“Già mai non mi conforto,” like most of the poetry in the voice of a woman (and indeed like most medieval love poetry in general), sees the narrator's amorous misadventures as a complex power game. And it heightens the drama of the love situation by viewing it from the perspective of the beloved who, because of the control that various social forces exert over her, typically engages in that power game from a disadvantaged position. Anonymous poems in the voice of a woman lament the brutality of a husband whom the lady wishes to escape in the arms of her lover (these are the “malmaritata” poems). Or they deplore those who stand between the lady and her lover—like, for instance, the lover's new lady in “*Oi lassa 'namorata*.⁴” Love unmans the (masculine) lover by asserting its sovereignty over him. In the poems in the voice of a woman, the beloved bemoans her loss of power not only because love dominates her, but also (and more acutely) because family or social pressures prevent her from fully enjoying the pleasures of love.

Of course, the (fictional) lady's capacity to voice her (fictional) powerlessness in polished meter and rhyme may seem to contradict that fiction of powerlessness. In “*Oi lassa 'namorata*,” a spurned woman imagines her song as an instrument of revenge against the lover who has betrayed her. Her ability to perform her woes, to use them to entertain us, gives her a voice and thus empowers her. In another anonymous poem in the voice of a woman, “*Di dolor convien cantar*” (“I ought to sing of my pain”), the lady explicitly contrasts exterior powerlessness and interior empowerment. She describes her hopeless situation: her brutal husband beats her; there is no one to help her. She prays to God to deal her husband a painful death; then with satisfaction she pictures the contrast between her abject public persona and her concealed triumphant spirits:

I would mourn him in public,
and I would strike myself with my hand;

then I would say to myself:
I praise God, Lord of heaven.⁵

The lady's imagined victory, when God deals her husband the wretched death he deserves, trumps her current abjection. And her ability to sing the situation—woeful present and imagined revenge—grants her a satisfying power over the forces that oppress her.

In the poems in the voice of a woman, the lady acknowledges her powerlessness. Even love itself, normally the affirmation of the singing subject's individuality and vitality, may be imposed on the lady against her will by impersonal forces beyond her control. Compagnetto da Prato seems to have made a specialty of feminine poetry: both of his two extant poems are in the voice of a woman. In "Per lo marito c'ò rio" ("Because of my wicked husband"), the lady complains of her vile husband and states that it was his accusations of adultery—rather than any preexisting affection—that sent her into the arms of her lover:

Because of the rage of an evil husband
you have me, and not because of love;
but since you have had me,
so has your sweetness entered my heart
that it has turned my torment into joy.⁶

Thus, the lady notes with satisfaction, her husband's petty suspicions have brought to pass the situation he most feared. And in one of the finest of the poems in a feminine voice, Rinaldo d'Aquino (author of "Già mai non mi conforto") makes his feminine protagonist a plaything in the hands of the elements. Love was not her idea, she claims; but when spring is in the air, love can scarcely be avoided.

It induces me to love—
the perfume of the flowers
and the song of the birds;
when the day appears,
I hear the sweet sentiments
and the fresh verses,
so sweet and so lovely, that they make—and they trill
their songs, in competition with each other,
a great contest that fills the trees.⁷

"I did not love," the lady states, "but the weather caused me to love" (vv. 29–30). In these poems, players more powerful than she bully the lady into loving. By enacting her incapacity to be an actor—by performing her abject

reaction to the forces that control her—she stages a peculiarly satisfying drama of powerlessness. The poem opens a window into a dark room: the heart of the lady to whom the poet normally addresses his verses. And the contrast between the lady's impotence and the brilliant competence of her poetic performance of her situation contributes substantially to the pleasure that the audience derives from these works.

The poems in the voice of a woman play a sophisticated and delightful psychological game with the power dynamics of the love situation. But this, of course, differs substantially from the claims that critics have made for these poems: that they open a window into a room even more shadowy than the feminine heart. The anonymous poems in particular seem to express a dynamic *psychological* realism. But they do not embody a parallel *cultural-linguistic* realism. Because the poet does not clutter his composition with the vocabulary of his intellectual ambition, the poetic diction is more limpid—free, for instance, of belabored syntax, specialized technical terms, or words borrowed from the Occitan. The psychological drama moves forcefully and swiftly and encourages us to see the poem as fresh, dynamic, and naturalistic. But the relative emotional realism of the work does not generate a parallel linguistic or cultural realism.

As an exception to this observation, I would cite one of the liveliest and most charming works of the Sicilian Romance corpus. In Cielo d'Alcamo's dialogue poem, "Rosa fresca aulentissima" ("Fresh fragrant rose"), a courtly lover argues with a beloved who speaks in a rather more earthy register.⁸ He begs her to entertain his petitions, and she tells him to get real. After sparring for some thirty-one stanzas (this is by far the longest poem in the Sicilian corpus—a mini-epic), Cielo's two lovers reach an amiable solution. The lady acquiesces to the lover's request, and the poem closes with her happily imagining the pleasures that they will have between the sheets. The language of Cielo's poem, particularly in the stanzas spoken by the lady, is gratifyingly frank and direct. The tendency to see the Sicilian poetry in a feminine voice as a trace of the spoken Romance language of Sicily dates back to Dante's treatment of Cielo's poem. Dante would cite it in the *De vulgari eloquentia* as an example of the *spoken* Sicilian vernacular, in distinction to the *written* version of the vernacular tongue used by the Sicilian poets. He uses the poem to illustrate his point that, whereas the learned tongue that the Sicilians used in their poetry served as an admirable poetic vehicle, the language as it was spoken by Sicilians is not an appropriate medium for lofty vernacular composition (*DVE* I, xii, 6).

Through the course of the poem, the beloved peppers her remarks with references to the fabled riches of the East. "I am mistress of coins of

massamotino gold,” she loftily declares. “If you gave me the riches of Saladin, and in addition as much as the Sultan possesses, you couldn’t even touch my hand” (vv. 27–30). The lady uses the *massamotino*, a gold coin minted by the Muslim rulers of North Africa and al-Andalus, as a symbol of fabulous wealth. Later in the poem (vv. 99–100), she will refer again to the riches of the sultan, and draw a rather saucy parallel between him and the pope: “I wouldn’t deign to give you my hand for all the riches of the Pope and the Sultan!” And she echoes this association of the Oriental world with extravagant wealth when she makes reference to “iscarlatto” and “sciamito,” precious fabrics imported from the East (v. 117). Significantly, although the lady persists in identifying the Orient as a source of exotic riches, the lover does not. Cielo may intend to mock her facile judgment that anything Oriental is therefore more valuable (as Giacomo teases those who think that Oriental sapphires are worth more in “Amor non vole” [see above, pp. 78–80]). However, it is also possible that he responds, without intention to parody, to the conservative linguistic role that women play in society. Cicero famously noted that his mother’s speech preserved certain archaic mannerisms, words, and constructions. Cielo’s beloved could use Arabic points of reference because she, like Cicero’s mother, echoes old ways of talking, figures of speech that would have been common in Norman Sicily but seem antiquated and quaint in Cielo’s day.

The vocabulary used by the beloved in “Rosa fresca aulentissima” distinguishes her voice from the lover’s. This is not generally true of the Sicilian poetry in the voice of a woman, in which psychological affect rather than linguistic register marks the feminine voice as different. The woman’s persistent representation of her powerlessness (not, by the way, a feature of the feisty beloved’s self-presentation in “Rosa fresca aulentissima”) marks her experience of the love situation. Perceived powerlessness is a standard facet of the experience of love in medieval vernacular poetry, for both the lover and the beloved. Sicilian Romance poetry reflects this normative perception of love and its impact on the one who loves. The Sicilian corpus, however, includes a discrete number of works that take on the power dynamic of the love situation from a unique perspective: poems written by poets who—because of their extraordinary social position—may be expected to experience a more distinctive reaction to the giddy loss of power that comes with love.

Frederick II was himself a poet; some seven poems are attributed to him in the early manuscripts of the Sicilian corpus, though literary historians do not accept all of these attributions. Frederick’s name is traditionally associated with “Dolze meo drudo” (“My sweet lover”), a dialogue poem: the beloved speaks half of it, her lover the other half. In the first stanzas of the

poem, the lady laments the fact that her lover must depart. She does not (as the women in the poems discussed above tend to do) lay the blame for her separation from her lover on any particular malefactor. She simply states that his going will leave her bereft. In his reply, the lover justifies the actions of the one who sends him away:

My sweet woman, my going
is not by my own will:
for I must obey
the one who has power over me.⁹

The poem does not complain about the injustice of the authority that imposes separation on the lovers. Rather, it presents power as an objective fact and implicitly defends the lover's obedience to that power. "Per la fera membranza" ("By the cruel memory"), also attributed to Frederick, is not in the voice of a woman. But it too, like "Dolze meo drudo," anticipates the lover's departure and more aggressively asserts the justice of the lord whose command the lover must obey:

But without doubt
I understood that my lord—
when I went away
from my treasure—was gracious:
for he neither would nor could fail,
and he would not permit
my suffering, if he knew
that it torments me
so much that it makes him fear for my life.¹⁰

Like Rinaldo d'Aquino's lady in "Già mai non mi conforto," Frederick's lovers mention the baneful influence of a lord who has power over the lover. But Frederick's poems do not challenge the justice of the lord's actions, as Rinaldo's does. We would, of course, expect this attitude toward authority in poetry written by the Sicilian emperor. In fact, not all literary historians accept the attribution of these two poems to Frederick. They suggest that a manuscript copyist attached Frederick's name to works by unknown authors simply because of the conservative attitude toward political authority voiced in the poems.¹¹

Another of the poems attributed to Frederick in a number of early manuscripts provides intriguing perspective on the manipulation of the language of power in the emperor's voice. In "Poi ch'a voi piace" ("Since it pleases you"), Frederick consistently uses words derived from the Italian root *valere*

(to be strong, to have power) to describe the lady: *valente* (“worthy woman,” v. 10); *valimento* (“you give me *strength*, v. 13”; “the *power* of your appearance,” v. 49); *valore* (“you have more *worth*,” vv. 28 and 29).¹² The lover represents the lady’s empowerment and his own disempowerment as the inevitable result of the love situation. This, of course, is standard in the diction of medieval vernacular love poetry. But it possesses a particular piquancy when it is deployed in a poem written by the emperor himself. It is to be presumed that playful manipulation of the language of sovereignty in poems written by the emperor, and in particular his fictional surrender of his sovereignty to his beloved, provided a frisson for reader and poet alike.

The lover’s pantomime of powerlessness was a set piece in Sicilian Romance poetry, as was the love poem spoken in the voice of a woman. Both of these narrative strategies, however, should be read precisely as drama: performances of psychological states that might gain effectiveness from either their realism (in the case of the poems that perform powerlessness in the voice of a woman) or, conversely, their *surrealism*, their contradiction of the commonsensical (the most extreme example of this being the poems that perform powerlessness in the voice of a lover who is also the emperor). Nor (*pace* the romantic critics) do the poems in the voice of a woman in general seem to transmit an indigenous Sicilian voice—with the possible exception of “*Rosa fresca aulentissima*.” Of course, our knowledge of the biography of the poet may encourage us to see a peculiar heightened significance in that poet’s manipulation of the set scenes of the love drama. Though this does not happen often (we know very little about the lives of most of the Sicilian poets), the eventful lives of poets such as Frederick and his illegitimate son, Re Enzo, certainly temper our reading of their works.¹³ Enzo—an adventurer who followed in his father’s footsteps by cultivating the arts and the princely sports, fighting in frequent battles, fathering his own illegitimate brood, and angering the pope when he acquired the crown of Sardinia—was taken prisoner after the Bolognese army defeated him in battle in 1249. He would remain in prison in Bologna, despite his and his father’s protests, until his death in 1272. His jailers treated him graciously (he managed to father two more illegitimate children during his incarceration), but his imprisonment was nonetheless a source of bitterness, as his poetry attests. “*Amor mi fa sovente*” (“Love makes me often”) makes reference to the poet’s “*lunga adimoranza*” (“long journey,” or even “long exile”; v. 11, and cf. v. 5) away from his beloved; and we are inclined to see this as understatement rather than the poetic lover’s hyperbole. In the closing stanza, the poet sends his poem off to give his regards to his lord (“*Messere*,” presumably Frederick II). He asks the poem to relate to Frederick “the troubles that I have”:

He who has me in his power
keeps me imprisoned
so that I can scarcely live.¹⁴

Some editors have silently corrected the masculine pronoun in this passage, feeling that the poet must be making a standard reference to the *lady* who holds sovereignty over him. Most, however, have rightly seen the biographical reference. The poet alludes to the political authorities who have power over him and commissions his poem to petition his father—a man, after all, who wields no small political influence himself—to maneuver his release so that he might be free to court his (perhaps real, perhaps fictional) lady.¹⁵

* * *

The poetry in the voice of a woman is not particularly realistic, any more than the poetry in a masculine voice is. For that reason, it can tell us little about the verities of Sicilian culture, or about the experiences of real women in particular. We know vexingly little about the lives of Sicilians during this period, and even less about the lives of Sicilian *women* in particular. The historical record that might help us to understand the relationship between literature and life is perversely thin. The Sicilian monarchy presents the noteworthy exception to this generalization: about the *queens* of Sicily, we do possess a discrete amount of biographical information. The Norman monarchs tended to choose their wives not from among the families of powerful Sicilians. Rather, they married women from prominent European courts. Thus, their wives might be presumed to have brought a European influence to the cultural life of the kingdom. However—despite the fact that a number of the Norman queens ruled as regents for their underage sons; despite evidence that some of the queens had the capacity to influence Sicilian culture and even exerted a certain amount of effort to this end—this does not seem to have been the case.

The Norman queens (like their husbands) were often larger than life characters, whose extraordinary biographies reflect the turbulent times in which they lived. Roger II married a woman by the name of Elvira, daughter of a Spanish king (Alfonso VI, king of Castile and León) and his Moorish wife (Zaida, who took the Christian name Isabella when she married Alfonso). The marriage seems to have been a sentimental as well as a dynastic success. Elvira bore Roger five sons, including the next king of Sicily, William I, before she died in 1135, at the age of about thirty five. A medieval historian reports that following Elvira's death, Roger was "so saddened by

the bitterness of mourning that he closed himself for many days in his room, and did not appear except to his private staff; and so it happened that a rumor gradually spread, not only to those who were far away but even to those in the immediate proximity, that Roger had died.”¹⁶ Roger was obliged to put down an attempted coup when an ambitious Sicilian count sought to take advantage of the power vacuum resulting from the king’s withdrawal from the public eye.

Although Elvira had given Roger five sons, only one of them—the sickly, unpromising William—reached maturity. Fifteen years after Elvira’s death, Roger was obliged to marry again in order to ensure succession. Again, his long celibacy was quite extraordinary. Even with a plurality of potential heirs, a medieval king was likely to remarry following the death of a wife, both because marriage presented an opportunity to forge political alliances and because a consort came in handy at state ceremonies. Roger’s reluctance to remarry seems to provide further evidence of his affection for Elvira.

But William, against the odds, survived his father and was crowned king of Sicily following Roger’s death. In about the year 1150, he married Margaret of Navarre, daughter of King Garcia IV Ramirez of Navarre and Margaret de l’Aigle. The biography of William’s consort demonstrates what would become a truism of the Norman queens: they attracted attention, in general, only when their actions offended public opinion. Following her husband’s death, while Margaret ruled as regent for her son, the second William, she summoned a party of Frenchmen to Sicily (including Peter of Blois, who acted as tutor to young William). The Sicilians were not pleased at the influx of foreigners; nor did the French seem inclined to lengthen their stay in Sicily, although Margaret insisted and ultimately prevailed on this point. With Margaret’s support, one of the Frenchmen—Stephen, son of the count of Perche—was made chancellor and archbishop-elect of Palermo. This action earned her the enmity of the Sicilians, who resented the power given to a “puerum alienigenam” (a foreign-born boy) and suspected that less than professional sentiments motivated the queen’s actions. It was said that “the queen, although she was Spanish, called this French boy her brother, spoke to him too familiarly, and looked at him with hungry eyes; they feared that under the cover of professional proximity, an illicit love was hidden.”¹⁷ But Margaret’s efforts to staff her court with Europeans proved unfruitful. Peter of Blois soon left Sicily and described the island afterward as a hazard to travelers by virtue of both its climate and its people (“Sicily is to be faulted because of its air, and it is to be faulted for the malice of those who live there; I consider it hateful and almost uninhabitable”¹⁸). Stephen’s (and Margaret’s) political enemies would drive Stephen himself out of Sicily in 1168.

So, too, a late Norman consort—Sibilla, wife of Tancredi of Lecce, an illegitimate grandson of Roger II who vied for control of Sicily following the death of William II in 1189—drew the enmity of her contemporaries by virtue of her political machinations. We possess a wholly unsympathetic account of Sibilla in the history written by Peter of Eboli. Peter, a partisan of Sibilla and Tancredi's rivals for the Sicilian throne, Norman Constance and Hohenstaufen Henry VI, details an intrigue that pitted Sibilla against Constance (fig. 6). In the opening chapter of this unsavory history (which, in honesty, seems to consist of equal parts polemic and factual account), Tancredi asks Sibilla to invite Constance to Palermo. In her reply to him, Sibilla accuses him of raving senselessly; to honor Constance with her company, Sibilla believes, would implicitly acknowledge Constance's authority. In the end, Constance, rather than being received as an honored guest, was imprisoned by Tancredi and Sibilla. But the ruse did not last long. The pope interceded and Constance was released to the keeping of her husband. Following Henry's elevation to the Sicilian throne, Sibilla would repent and seek forgiveness for her scheming; she, along with her daughter, would end her life in an Alsatian convent.¹⁹

The machinations of that Constance against whom Sibilla plotted, of course, would have a more appreciable effect on history. And historians would repay Constance in kind, making her (like the kings of Sicily) the protagonist of fantastic tales. Constance, daughter of Roger II, had been consigned to a convent, from which she was summoned to marry her Hohenstaufen husband in order to grant dynastic support to his Sicilian ambitions. She had already reached an advanced age, by medieval standards, when she was married and had passed her fortieth birthday when she bore her first and only child, Frederick II. The fourteenth-century historian Villani reports that Frederick's birth challenged belief on two counts: because he was born to a woman consecrated to God, and because of his mother's age (which he exaggerates, giving her more than fifty two years when she gave birth). The Sicilians, Villani says, frankly doubted Constance's capacity to bear a child at her age; “for which reason, when the time came for her to give birth, she had a tent pitched in the center of Palermo, and made an announcement that any woman who wished might come to see her. And many came and saw, and so the suspicions ceased.”²⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, in his biographical dictionary of famous women, exaggerates both Constance's age—he calls her a “wrinkled old woman”—and the prophetic significance of her pregnancy and Frederick's birth. He attributes to Constance's son the responsibility for the eventual fall of the Kingdom of Sicily. And after detailing his (rather fantastic) version of Constance's late marriage and pregnancy, he asks: “Who will



Figure 6. The Sibylla and Constance *querelle*. Tancredi passes a message to a courier; at the bottom of the page, Sibylla receives Constance and, simultaneously, the letter from her husband. Bearded citizens of Palermo lament the fate that will befall Constance—depicted here, unrealistically, as quite completely guileless. (Copyright Burgerbibliothek Bern, Petrus de Ebulo, *De rebus siculis carmen*, Cod. 120. II, fol. 124r)

not judge Constance's conception and childbirth to be monstrous?"²¹ In truth, Constance's actions were characterized by less supernatural portent and more pragmatic significance. Following Frederick's birth (in 1194, and in Iesi, not Palermo) and Henry's death (in 1197), Constance ignored her husband's wishes that a German ally be made Frederick's regent. She sent the Germans out of Sicily, named the pope regent to her son, and had the four-year-old prince crowned king of Sicily in Palermo, before her own death in 1198.

History might remember the name of the Sicilian queen, particularly when she—like Margaret of Navarre or Constance, or like Adelaide, Roger II's mother—acted as her son's regent following her husband's death. But the queens seem to have had little appreciable impact on the cultural life of the kingdom. The Norman kings tended to marry women from European (typically French or Spanish) courts, like the consorts mentioned above—with the exceptions of Sibilla, wife of the illegitimate and luckless Tancredi, and Constance, wife of the scion of a German house, both of whom were Sicilians. William II married Joanna Plantagenet, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, a name that looms large in the history of European literature. But even this match seems to have done little to promote Romance letters in Sicily. Rather, the Norman monarchs seem to have pursued a diametrically opposed literary policy: they solicited the production of poetry in Arabic.

This fact bears emphasis for a number of reasons. Literary historians tend to use the cultural charisma of Frederick II to explain the sudden emergence of a Romance poetic movement in the thirteenth century: they often place Frederick II at the center of the cultural life of his kingdom and speculate that he wielded a strong influence on the literary life of his age in particular. In fact, the historical record does not support these claims. It is true that during Frederick's reign a Romance literary movement appeared, without apparent precedent, on Sicilian soil. And it is true that Frederick himself was a poet; for that reason, we can assume that he took a more than passing interest in the literary life of his age. Yet during Frederick's reign we do not find the kind of evidence typical of the Norman era, attesting to the monarch's direct interest in the literary life of his age. We do not possess, for instance, panegyric poems dedicated to Frederick II or historical accounts that describe him as a literary patron.

The image of the Norman monarchs that has emerged from the work of recent social and economic historians depicts them as canny rulers whose interest in the Arabic language and Arab institutional culture was guided by purely pragmatic ends: they used the Arabs' sophisticated bureaucratic institutions to administer their Sicilian kingdom.²² There is some truth in this characterization. The Norman monarchs got a great deal of mileage out of

Arab institutions. And their adoption of the bureaucratic culture of the Arabs did not imply a parallel appreciation of Arab citizens in Sicily. And yet, consideration of the cultural record adds another dimension to the characterization of Norman exploitation of Arab culture as pure opportunism: the panegyric poetry produced under the Norman monarchs, the scientific works in Arabic, the Arabicizing pleasure palaces all suggest motivations of a less pragmatic sort. The Normans, it seems, believed that Arab cultural institutions could express their monarchic ambitions in a way that neither Latin nor Greek institutions could.

Given the absence of panegyric poetry in the Sicilian Romance corpus, the predominance of the form in Sicilian Arabic poetry is quite striking and suggests that the Norman monarchs engaged in the literary life of their age in a way that Frederick did not. I discussed above the best known and most delightful of the panegyric poems addressed to the Norman monarch, al-Atrabanishi's composition in praise of Roger's fishing preserve, Favara (pp. 26–27). Another panegyric for Roger seems to be the result of a literary competition between two poets. It begins in the voice of a poet known as al-Buthayri (that is, from the city Butera):

Pass round the golden carnelian-red [wine]
and join the morning to the evening [in your revelry] . . .

No living is serene, save
in the sweet heights of Sicily . . .

and is completed by the poet Ibn Bashrun, who upon hearing al-Buthayri's opening salvo composes additional verses that duplicate his rhyme and meter:

Already its gardens have burst into bloom,
from amongst them emerge radiant robes

The fragrance of its earth is overspread
with an ornamented silk brocade

Its breaths are wafted to you
fragrant with the perfume of amber

And its trees, well-ordered
with an abundance of harvest fruits²³

Al-Buthayri's and Ibn Bashrun's composition, like al-Atrabanishi's, praises the monarch by praising his pleasure gardens, which are apparently synonymous

with the Norman king's power, wealth, and authority in the eyes both of the king and his public. The anthologist 'Imad al-Din, who preserved these fragments (and cut them short with a curt dismissal of poetry "in praise of the infidel"), names Roger in his introductory comment as the beneficiary of the poets' praises.

Al-Buthayri's and Ibn Bashrun's panegyrics, while appealing, are not extraordinarily sophisticated. The panegyric—in the Arab tradition as in the West a form of moral poetry—was a showpiece genre for the Arab poets, an opportunity to show off one's poetic chops and to garner praise and more tangible rewards from the poem's addressee; other poets wrote somewhat flashier and more ambitious poems of praise for the Norman kings. Thus Abu Hafs—imprisoned for unknown reasons, and writing to earn his release—wrote a panegyric incorporating sophisticated wordplay, depicting the Norman monarch (in this case, again, Roger) as a ray of light dispelling the darkness:

In the darkness his face is gleaming dawn:
you would think that the splendor of the sun were among those who envy him . . .

When matters are uncertain, then his sword
writes, whitening their blackness with its ink

The anthologist 'Imad al-Din cuts off this poem (as he had al-Buthayri's and Ibn Bashrun's) because it is written "in praise of the infidels"; but he allows Abu Hafs a concessionary explanation: "I limit myself to these selections, though they make one thirst for more, since they transmit praise for the infidels, may God speed them to the flames of his hell-fire. But the poet can be forgiven, on the grounds that he was imprisoned [when he wrote this poem]."²⁴

The fourteenth-century geographer Ibn Fadl-Allah, in the chapter of his geography dealing with Sicily, records a composition written by a traveler who was captured while passing by Sicily and, like Abu Hafs, imprisoned. Brought before the king, the prisoner recited a poem pleading for his freedom. Ibn Fadl-Allah does not tell us the name of this poet, whom he identifies only as belonging to the Banu Rawaha (the Rawaha tribe)²⁵. Nor does he tell us who the monarch was to whom the poem was addressed. I quote selections from it because they provide a useful contrast to the artful petitions of Abu Hafs. The poem opens with an invocation of the monarch:

May you live, and be safe from destruction, and protected from it;
may you be successful in this world, and may you find reconcile in the next

Oh king, whose troops sweep through the land
and increase the slaughter, and multiply the prisoners

The poet continues with a description of the battle at sea in which he and his companions were attacked, defeated, and captured by the monarch's fleet. He concludes his poem with a pathetic evocation of the aged mother and young daughter who await him at home:

I left them—by God—he knows that they
are in straightened and narrow conditions

They are bankrupt, in hardship, dispersed,
worse than prisoners—and would that they were prisoners!

If they were prisoners, they would be in rapture:
I would be with you—we would not be hungry, nor naked²⁶

The ingenuous simplicity of the poem apparently proved efficacious. Ibn Fadl-Allah informs us that the king not only released the poet, but rewarded him with money and passage home. The tale is related by Ibn Fadl-Allah in illustration of his point that the kings of Sicily—both Muslim and infidel—were men of discernment and generosity.

A state functionary known as Abu al-Daw' left one of the most pathetic and affecting poems written for the Norman monarchs: a lament on the death of Roger II's son (one of the four sons that Elvira bore him who were destined to die young). Abu al-Daw' describes the general mourning for the prince; at the climax of the poem, the mourners are compared—in a complex metaphor reminiscent of Dante—to both the souls called forth on the day of judgment and a flock of birds:

Oh, day of abominable horror
whose terrible sight engendered grey hair in children

It was as if the herald had announced its coming
and set humanity in motion, one and all, just as they were

And the spacious earth became straitened with humanity—still they gathered,
a thronging crowd of men and women

And hearts were torn, not sleeves; nightingales pronounce the formula,
“Unto God we return”;
and spirits and minds were shaken

And they [i.e. humanity], dressed in gay clothes, resembled white doves
but now have become crows, dressed in clothes of mourning²⁷

Evidence like these poems suggests that during the Norman era the monarch did serve as the focal point for the cultural life of his kingdom—or at least that he took an active and indeed participatory role in that life, presumably by providing material support (and the occasional “get out of jail free” card) to the poets who wrote in his praise. Furthermore, it implies that the Norman monarchs’ attraction to the culture of their Arab subjects transcended a purely mercenary and pragmatic interest in bureaucratic institutions: Arab Sicilians knew that they could catch the king’s eye by writing poetry in his praise. But the same sort of evidence does not exist during the thirteenth century. A number of factors militate against the notion that Frederick functioned as an organizing force, a center of gravity, for the thirteenth-century poets. Frederick had no *court*, in the geographic sense; his peripatetic lifestyle made it uniquely difficult for a physically centered poetic movement to emerge. The absence of panegyrics in the Romance corpus militates against the perception that Frederick played the role of Maecenas for the thirteenth-century poets. And although they (famously) celebrate Frederick as a discerning consumer of culture, no contemporary historians extol him as a cultural leader. The poetry authored by him demonstrates his avid interest in literary culture. He experimented—like other Sicilian functionaries of his age—with an exciting and dynamic new literary phenomenon. However, no corresponding evidence supports the supposition that he sponsored or mentored the Romance poetic movement.

If agency for the Sicilian movement is to be attributed to any single factor, it seems that it must be to an impersonal one. Despite his charisma, despite his prodigious energy, Frederick is an unlikely candidate to have played a defining role in the emergence of a vernacular culture in Sicily. The narrative of cultural history in Sicily focuses our attention on another factor, whose agency might be given the credit for the swift and decisive transformation of literary culture during the thirteenth century: the linguistic dynamic itself; the growing and irresistible hegemony of Latin and its spoken cognate, Romance, and the eclipse of Arabic as a literary language.

* * *

How can the literary historian account for epochal linguistic shifts like the one that occurred in Sicily during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? Clearly, the *motives* for linguistic change do not pose a significant problem. Sicily had been an Arabo-Islamic state, and was conquered by Western Christians: these bare facts made a linguistic and literary transition inevitable. But the *mechanics* of that transition remain mysterious. And the shift in governments

fails to answer the most puzzling and intriguing question surrounding Sicilian literary history: Why did the first Italianate literary movement emerge precisely in Sicily, a linguistic and cultural borderland, rather than from the Italian heartland, say, for example, Tuscany? Why did Sicilian poets not simply follow the lead of peninsular poets and write in a learned prestige language—in an imported or hybrid tongue such as Occitan or Franco-Veneto? Scholars have generally answered this question by placing the figure of Frederick II at the center of the literary life of the thirteenth century. They have seen the sudden and surprising linguistic transformation of the thirteenth century as the result of a deliberate cultural policy, the product (like so much of contemporary Sicilian history) of Frederick's ambition. But by looking at thirteenth-century Sicilian cultural history as a continuation of the developments of the twelfth century, we are likely to see in it another dynamic and another drama. The thirteenth century saw the continuation and the culmination of the linguistic and cultural transformations of the twelfth century, marked in particular by an aggressive awareness of Sicily's pivotal cultural importance and by the growing hegemony of a Latin-Romance cultural combine. The extinction of Arabic as a literary language provided the impetus for the invention of a new literary tongue in order to give expression to Sicilian cultural self-consciousness.

This narrative of literary development in Sicily diminishes the agency of powerful individuals—the monarchs—and focuses attention on a broader cultural elite, or even (in its most radical application) at the popular level. It suggests that linguistic change in Sicily was general and diffuse, rather than imposed by a small cohort of powerful, dynamic and charismatic individuals. That is, it proposes something closer to a creolization model for linguistic change in Sicily. Creolization occurs in regions where ethnic migrations bring discrete linguistic and cultural traditions into communication. Typically, colonizing movements provoke these migrations. And typically the colonial situation freights languages with ideological significance. A language becomes not only a tool for conveying information; it functions also as a signifier itself, symbolizing in shorthand the cultural and political identities, history, and ambitions of a linguistic community. When colonization and migration bring languages into intimate contact, a brave new brood emerges. Those able to communicate between codes—those who are bilingual or trilingual—occupy a crucial and a privileged position. They mediate between linguistic communities. They play a necessary role in a complex marketplace (of commodities and ideas), situating themselves at the center of the economic, cultural, and social life of the community. Eventually, at the popular level, crossover vocabulary that once smacked of the foreign, the alien,

even the underclass (words, idioms, images, verbal or musical styles or forms) becomes naturalized as standard speech. A fusion of linguistic elements generates a hybrid tongue, based primarily on one language, but exploiting the convergence of idioms in the colonial situation. The creolization model, thus, describes a linguistic evolution that has its origin not in a cultural elite, but rather at the level of the lowest common (cultural, social, or economic) denominator. And it militates against seeing languages as hermetically sealed and discrete and argues that the logic of language itself encourages congress and hybridity, rather than priggish linguistic purism. The literature on creolization points to the laboratories of linguistic and cultural fusion in the modern world—not only the American south and the islands of the West Indies, where the word “creole” was born, but also Central and South America, North Africa, the Levant; in short, wherever the colonial dynamic exists—as proof of the irresistible logic of creole transformation. Where languages converge, fusion occurs: language has an appetite for conquest as insatiable as the Normans⁷.

A number of factors in the creolization model seem plausible in the Sicilian context: the challenge to monolingualism and linguistic isolationism in the context of the charged power dynamic of the colonial situation; the significance within that dynamic granted to individual languages; the central role played by charismatic code switchers in a complex marketplace economy. Other elements of the model, however, seem less appropriate to the Sicilian situation. The documented literary life of twelfth-century Sicily functioned less by encouraging congress between linguistic traditions than by galvanizing the distinctions between languages and their associated connotations, and uniting the three discrete literary traditions under the sign of the Sicilian state. Thus the Arabic language, used for literary composition, might connote cultural prestige (through its association with contemporary Islamic culture); Sicily’s own cultural past; or the tongue of the conquered. The Greek language—based on the manuscript evidence we possess—seemed to convey largely religious connotations (it was the language of the church), though it also served as an occasional language of culture (some, but not a great amount, of poetry was written in Greek; Sicilians produced some, but not a great number, of translations from the Arabic into Greek). Sicilians used Latin to record their histories, and thus they perceived historical event to be a drama performed for a Latin audience. And they recognized Latin as the lingua franca of the scientific community; they translated scientific works from the Arabic into Latin. The Sicilian state was able to unite these discrete threads of cultural production, and its capacity to mediate between cultures constituted its cultural identity. It used plurality to represent power.

Did a fusion of languages occur at the *popular* level in twelfth and thirteenth century Sicily? It may seem naïve to suggest that such was *not* the case, given the observable evidence of similar colonial situations in the modern world. And the sketchy evidence we possess from medieval al-Andalus (the *muwashshaha*, for instance) and from neighboring Malta (with its remarkable hybrid Arabic-Italianate language) would tend to support the notion that some kind of parallel fusion occurred in Sicily. But the evidence that might help us to understand the terms of creolization in Sicily, assuming that it did occur, is very scanty indeed. We can establish that a modest amount of linguistic borrowing occurred.²⁸ However, we possess virtually no evidence that might help us to understand the evolution of popular literary culture—documentation of popular song, for instance—in medieval Sicily. This fact helps to explain cultural historians' emphasis on the lives and the influence of the monarchs, about whom we *do* possess a respectable amount of information. And it justifies the romantic historians' keen interest in the poetry in the voice of a woman, which seemed at first blush to hold the grail of Sicilian literary history: the *popular voice* that, the romantics believed, was the source of medieval vernacular literary production in general.

Furthermore, the linguistic transformation that finally occurred in thirteenth-century Sicily did not seem to follow a creolization model. Sicilians did not forge a new literary language by fusing linguistic registers. Rather, the Romance vernacular literary movement imposed a monolingualistic template upon an environment characterized by plurilingualism. Following a familiar medieval literary model, poets transformed a spoken language into a platform for a new literary language and infused compositions in this language with the ambitions normally expressed in a learned tongue. It was a typical *vernacularization* movement, then, to which the colonial dynamic added a sense of authority and even of inevitability. The language born in Sicily was associated with the champions in a recent military contest. And it was soon to become one of the great European literary languages.

And yet, the creolization model provides a potent optic for observing Sicily's literary and linguistic transits. It sensitizes the literary historian to the potential significance of the few linguistically or culturally hybrid texts that were produced—the architectural and numismatic inscriptions, the Arabic panegyrics for Christian monarchs. And it helps us to interpret the central strategy of the compound literary culture of the twelfth century: its capacity to see language as a signifier of the identity, history, and ambitions of a cultural community and to deploy the languages at its disposal as such in its textual culture. Finally, the creolization model brings into tighter focus the contingency of the vernacularization movements of the high Middle Ages. It

was by no means a foregone conclusion that an Italianate literary language would emerge in a region inhabited initially by Arabs and Greeks, conquered subsequently by Frankish-speaking Normans, and currently ruled by the scion of Norman and German houses. The literary *koine* invented by Sicilians was generated in a region that mediated between linguistic domains. Over the course of centuries, this language would evolve a logic of exclusivity and rigidity and would (like any other successful national language) become an instrument of monolingual repression. But at the moment of its generation this future was unimaginable: the newly minted tongue still must struggle for legitimacy and, before that, self-definition. The competition was not yet between monolithic, clearly defined and differentiated tongues, but rather between a nascent tongue and *tonguelessness*: historical anonymity, cultural invisibility.

Thus, while a “purist” creolization argument may not work to describe Sicilian culture, it serves as a useful corrective to standard narratives of literary evolution in Sicily. The creolization model focuses attention on the mechanics of linguistic transition, revealing the cultural contingency, multivalence, and linguistic play behind literary evolution. And so it provides a useful strategy for countering the tendencies to place the monarch at the center of Sicilian literary history and to see the literary transit of the thirteenth century in particular as part of a purposive and directed cultural policy. The record seems to suggest that the monarch did exert an influence over certain aspects of twelfth-century Sicilian literary history: that is, the period when an extraordinary and explicit hybridity characterized Sicilian literary and cultural production. But for the thirteenth century, when a Romance literary tradition emerged, despite the charisma of the monarch who cast such a long shadow over this era, similar evidence does not exist. It seems no less fanciful, and indeed in some ways more accurate, for the literary historian to attribute the impetus behind the literary evolution of this period to the agency of language itself: to cast a dynasty of languages rather than of monarchs in the starring roles, and to see the unfolding drama of Sicilian literary history as a power struggle *cum* family squabble among the reigning languages of the Mediterranean.

* * *

The romantic critic Adolfo Gaspary found in the Sicilian poetry in the voice of a woman—although these poems were written by men—a more genuine, more natural feminine voice than in the Occitan poems actually composed by women. The *trobairitz* (or female troubadours), he said, merely imitate

the men, “without imparting to their verses an individual imprint. In these few Italian poems, however, we should recognize, in the midst of a schoolish imitation, the first traces of a homegrown art (*un’arte propria*), the first rustlings of a natural sentiment.”²⁹ This faith in the capacity of the feminine voice (even when it is a male poet’s fiction) to express truths inaccessible to a male poet writing in a masculine voice might seem, to a post-romantic literary historian, a bit fanciful. The feminine voice does, it seems, provide a vehicle for a fresh approach to the game of love. Poems in the voice of a woman dispense with the rhetorical contortions typical of much vernacular love poetry; they use the feminine perspective to manipulate the power dynamic central to Romance vernacular love poetry. These sporting poems play with audience expectations and convey a spirited response to the conventions of vernacular love. But the poets’ recognition that the feminine voice gives them room to play does not necessarily imply an increased naturalism as much as a rambunctious awareness of the rules of the game. An attentive reading of the corpus might find a more suggestive individualism in the poetry that adopts the language of natural philosophy. These works are indeed more studied, more “schoolish” than the poetry in the voice of a woman. And yet they seem to express with a greater particularity the resources peculiar to the Sicilian situation and the ambitions peculiar to the Sicilian poets.

Sicilian cultural history, particularly during the period that is the focus of this study, poses a number of thorny difficulties. What in it is truly Sicilian? What external influences had a dynamic impact on the evolution of Sicilian culture? If the poetry in the voice of a woman seemed to promise answers to the first of these questions, the lives of the Sicilian queens might have offered avenues to respond to the second. Historians generally point to the queens, the majority of whom came from prominent European houses, to demonstrate the Sicilian monarchs’ European roots and European aspirations. And yet, whatever the monarchs’ motives for choosing European brides rather than hometown girls, these women brought little in the way of cultural influence. One might have expected a woman like Roger II’s wife Elvira, the daughter of an Arab mother and a Spanish father, to have encouraged Roger’s tastes for Arab culture. It is indeed possible that she did; if so, her sensibility left no trace in the historical record. William I’s wife, Margaret, in contrast, seems to have made a concerted effort during her regency to Europeanize her Sicilian court, bringing a French cohort to Sicily and placing these foreigners in positions of power. Her machinations bore scant fruit: the Sicilian barons resisted them and finally ejected the French from Sicily. The Sicilian consort who had the most decisive influence on subsequent history,

Constance, acted not to forge links with European courts, but to contain European influence in Sicily. Her actions following her husband's death ensured that her son, Frederick, would have a thoroughly Sicilian upbringing (he was not taken to Germany, as he might have been under a German regent) and that German power would not be given the opportunity to flourish on Sicilian soil. The Norman queens, in short—though their lives were filled with theatrical event—had little appreciable impact on Sicilian cultural history. Their biographies do not (as the historian might hope) serve as exempla illustrating the absorption of European culture in Sicily.

Sicilian cultural history remains a tightly coiled knot. While we can draw certain conclusions—and even correct the standard history of that evolution in certain ways—it seems unlikely that we will ever know as much about it as we know, for instance, about the contemporary evolution of British culture under Norman rule. Historians, it seems, have underestimated the impact that *Sicilian* history had on the development of Sicilian culture during the period that saw the emergence of a Romance literary tradition. Looking forward—toward Sicily's absorption into an Italian nation, and hence into Europe, during the nineteenth century—they have exaggerated the role played by imported European cultural traditions and thus have missed the importance that awareness of the Sicilian past had for thirteenth-century Sicilian poets and intellectuals. But there is much that will remain unknown concerning the mechanics of cultural and linguistic transition in Sicily, barring the emergence of substantive new evidence.

Such new evidence may yet substantially change our understanding of the emergence of the vernacular literatures in general, bringing it closer to a creolization model. In the Andalusian context, new documentation has significantly altered our perception of the mechanics of vernacularization. Witness, for instance, Maimonides speaking out against *muwashshahat* that “[arouse] and [praise] the instinct of lust, and [encourage] the soul to practice it,” regardless of the language (Hebrew, Arabic, or Romance) they use to achieve their nefarious purpose (quoted above, p. 14). It seems evident that emergent vernacular literatures—even movements as intellectually ambitious as the Sicilian—owe as much to the marketplace or the barroom as they do to the aristocratic literary salon or the monastery library. But we have lost the fragile ligaments that connected the new Sicilian vernacular tradition to its popular origins, if indeed such existed and were important in the Sicilian context. However, in the absence of evidence that might allow the literary historian to construct an *inductive* argument in defense of a creolization model of literary evolution in Sicily, she or he might still propose a *deductive* argument in favor of creolization, citing the analogical evidence of parallel

regions with a compound linguistic and literary tradition, and most persuasively the enduring complexity of the linguistic, literary, cultural, and social environment in Sicily. This seems to me a promising avenue for the conceptualization of future research in Sicilian literary history—a field made uniquely difficult by a combination of linguistic complexity and a scanty documentary record.

By the third decade of the thirteenth century, when the Romance poets (probably) began to write, Latinate/Romance culture had eclipsed Arabic culture in Sicily. And yet one of the most dramatic episodes of Sicilian Arab history (and one of the most impressive Sicilian heroines) dates to the middle years of Frederick II's reign, when a warrior by the name of Ibn 'Abbad spearheaded a Muslim resistance movement from his base in Rocca d'Entella, a hilltop stronghold just south of Palermo. In the year 1219/20, recognizing the hopelessness of his cause, Ibn 'Abbad negotiated a truce with Frederick that promised the resistance leader his freedom and a significant amount of booty, along with safe passage to Tunis. But Ibn 'Abbad's daughter did not trust Frederick and convinced her father that she should remain in Rocca d'Entella as guarantee of his safety. In fact, it was Frederick's men, not the emperor himself, whom Ibn 'Abbad should have feared. Shortly after they left for Tunis, the Christian sailors told Ibn 'Abbad that though Frederick had let him off, they would not be so generous; and they drowned him. Three years later, Ibn 'Abbad's daughter had her revenge. She sent Frederick a message, telling him that she could not control her fathers' warriors and feared for her safety. She asked for Frederick's assistance to wipe out the resistance movement and arranged to have three hundred of Frederick's men admitted to the city under cover of night. The next morning Frederick arrived, expecting to see his standards hanging from the walls of the city; but "what he saw was nothing other than the heads of his soldiers suspended on the battlements." In the ensuing exchange between Frederick and Ibn 'Abbad's daughter, Frederick commended her courage and her cunning and in his admiration asked her to bear his child. But she remained defiant: "I am master of you more than you are master of me," she wrote, "and I have injured you more than you have injured me. For your deceit was sufficient to make me lose face, and then my deceit claimed your warriors." In the end she, like her father before her, understood that she was fighting a battle she could not win. When her predicament became hopeless, she committed suicide.³⁰

By the time of Ibn 'Abbad's daughter's desperate and heroic maneuvers against him, Frederick had already begun the deportation of Sicily's Muslims to the mainland. And yet, despite his efforts to clear the land of Muslims, Rocca d'Entella remained a center of resistance. In 1243, Frederick again

(and for the last time) put down a Muslim uprising in the hilltop town. Indeed, despite the apparent efficiency of Frederick's deportation program, it is difficult to know precisely where to place the end of Sicily's Islamic history. To the present day, many Sicilians trace their ancestry and their identity to the Arabs, whom they link with the Normans, regarded still in the Sicilian imagination as "baptized sultans" (to use an epithet that disgruntled popes deployed in their war of words against the Norman monarchs). If the poetry that borrows the vocabulary of natural philosophy serves well as symbol of Sicily's role as a hinge between the Islamic and Christian spheres, the poetry in the voice of a woman admirably characterizes another aspect of Sicilian intellectual history. The pantomime of powerlessness in the feminine voice was a set piece in Romance vernacular love poetry. And vernacular poets typically used a popularizing register to stage their performance of courtship from a feminine perspective. But the drama of the loss of power phrased in a popular voice gains a peculiar significance in Sicily, where it serves to represent (at least in hindsight) the central cultural movement of the period: the toppling of the Arabic cultural dominance that had given Sicily its cultural edge, and the emerging hegemony of a Romance tongue that, naturalized by the poets of the peninsula, would become known as Italian.

6. Vernacularity and Sicilian Culture

*Bianca campagna, niura simenza,
L'omu chi la fa sempre la penza.*

[Bianca campagna, nera semenza,
l'uomo che la fa sempre la pensa.
Prima di farla; e anche dopo. Ed è la scrittura.]¹

[*White field, black seed,
The man who does it always gives it thought.*
Before doing it, and also afterward. And the answer is:
writing.]

THIS SICILIAN RIDDLE, recorded by twentieth-century novelist Leonardo Sciascia, rephrases one of the most famous texts in the history of the Italian language: the Indovinello Veronese, or Veronese riddle.² The Indovinello is a marginal inscription recorded in an early ninth-century Italian hand on an Iberian liturgical text produced around the year 700. Today, it is accepted as the first Italian vernacular text, the first known documentation of the steps the spoken language took away from Latin and in the direction of the vernacular on the Italian peninsula. The manuscript in which the riddle is recorded is generally referred to as a “Mozarabic breviary,” although this designation is not accurate. The term “Mozarabic” refers to Arabic-speaking Christians living in the Muslim states of the Iberian peninsula. But the Muslim conquest of the Iberian peninsula began in the year 711, and so the breviary actually predates Muslim-Christian cohabitation. In fact, it was produced in the same environment in which—according to the legend that introduces the book *Sydrac*—the first Latin translation of that book was made (see above, pp. 60–61): the Iberian peninsula in the era that predated the arrival of Muslim conquerors.

Here is the Indovinello Veronese: “Se pareba boves alba pratalia araba & albo vensoria teneba & negro semen seminaba” [He drives on the oxen, plows the white field, holds a white ploughshare, and sows black seed]. The solution to the riddle, of course, is *the scribe*. That is, the Indovinello’s subject is the agent responsible for recording the Indovinello, which is why the riddle is such a delightful text—it is the first documentation of a regional, proto-Italian form of oral communication, and it gives us a self-portrait of the scribe producing this documentation. The Indovinello is a disarmingly informal text (*vernacular* in the popular sense of the word) about the recording in writing, the *grammatization*, of a language that has heretofore lived only on the tongue (the *vernacular* in the technical sense of the word).

It would be some time before the promise embedded in this riddle was fulfilled in Italy, the last of the Romance regions to develop a vernacular literary tradition. And that tradition would emerge precisely in Sicily, in a territory remarkable for a convergence of tongues and literary traditions. Furio Brugnolo, discussing the evolution of what he terms the Sicilian “cultural project,” identifies linguistic difference as a crucial leavening in the genesis of vernacular literary traditions. The Romance poetry of the thirteenth century, he argues, takes the works of the troubadours as its model and does not respond to an appreciable degree to other literary influences. However, the convergence of cultural influences in Sicily seems to constitute “a factor of capital importance from the historical point of view, since it confirms what had been revealed time and again by other kingdoms (think of the Plantagenet court of Henry II of England, or the Castilian court of Alfonso X): that the decisive push toward the development and consolidation of the new vernacular literatures is attested precisely there where there is greater interaction between different languages and cultures.”³ That is, the prerequisites for the production of a vernacular culture include an environment marked by linguistic difference, the presence of distinct linguistic and literary traditions in opposition to which an indigenous vernacular tradition may define itself.

During the Norman era, Sicily did not generate a vernacular culture. Rather, the literary tradition that emerged in Norman Sicily might be termed a “compound *grammatica*” culture. The diverse *grammaticae* that converged in Sicily became the media for the development of discrete textual traditions: Arabic for poetry, Latin for histories, and Greek for pastoral texts. Alongside this tradition, a more idiomatic trend developed: the parallel deployment of the *grammaticae* in nonliterary texts, a usage that was scarcely literary in the true sense of the word. A real vernacular culture would emerge only during the reign of Frederick II. The extinction of the *grammatica* tradition that had been used during the Norman era as the language of choice for literary purposes, Arabic, made the genesis of a vernacular tradition in thirteenth-century Sicily not only possible but even necessary.⁴

The Normans produced a compound *grammatica* culture that translated between the three *grammaticae* present in their Sicilian kingdom. During the thirteenth century, Sicilian poets would situate themselves as translators between the mainland Romance literary traditions and their Sicilian kingdom. Acknowledging their position as not an *avant-garde* but rather an *arrière-garde*, they would respond self-consciously to the initiatives of previous Romance poets and would produce the only *poetic* translations—the only translations of lyric poetry into lyric poetry—of the Middle Ages. Eliot Weinberger, the twentieth-century translator and essayist best known for his

translations of the poetry of Octavio Paz, wrote in an essay on poetic translation: “Nearly everywhere, the great ages of poetry have been, not coincidentally, periods of intense translation. With no news from abroad, a culture ends up repeating the same things to itself. It needs the foreign not to imitate, but to transform.”⁵ We may quibble with the historical accuracy of this statement. Medieval poets did not typically write translations of other poets’ works. But it is certainly true that the historical period that saw the emergence of vernacular poetic traditions in the Christian West was also marked by “intense translation” of *scientific* texts. The Sicilian Romance poets used the physiology and the natural philosophy translated from Arab exemplars (as well as Occitan lyric) as springboards for their poetic compositions. Weinberger’s aphorism crystallizes the importance of linguistic and cultural difference in general, and of communications between linguistically defined communities in particular, during periods of intense literary creativity and productivity. Translation functions not as a replacement for indigenous production, but as a supplement to it. Its purpose is, precisely, to *produce difference*—to differentiate between the works of other cultures and an indigenous literary tradition, between self and other. The Romance poetry of the thirteenth century “translates” both the cultural history of the Sicilian state (at once claiming that history and establishing a difference from it) and Romance vernacular literary history (at once claiming it, again, and distancing it). The Romance poetry produced in thirteenth-century Sicily—in its explicit and self-conscious responses to Occitan poetics; in its manipulation of the translated natural philosophy of the Islamic world—triangulated itself in a complex cultural terrain by establishing its sameness and difference in relation to both the Sicilian past and the literary traditions of other parts of the Christian world.

The vernacular poets situated themselves on a detailed geocultural and historical continuum: the nascent vernacular cultures of the Middle Ages occupied a precarious position between high culture and low, between indigenous and imported cultures, and between each other. Vernacular literature was both the same as writing in the *grammatica*—it was high literature—and different from it: written in a regionally specific native tongue. It was a regional and popular culture, using the native tongue as a medium. At the same time, it differed from regional culture because it communicated across regional boundaries, responding to exterior literary traditions, and addressed a broadly defined audience. And because the vernacular cultures emerged at roughly the same time in a number of different regions, they acknowledged and answered each other. Nowhere is this tendency more apparent than in

Sicily, where poets began to write in the vernacular well after a vernacular tradition had emerged on the European continent. Thus Sicilian vernacular culture negotiated between sameness and difference on a number of levels. As vernacular poets, the Sicilians challenged the “deep” literary history of the *grammatica* tradition. At the same time, they communicated with a more contemporary literary history, represented by the Romance avant-gardes of the immediate past. These already complex nuances were further complicated by an extraordinary regional cultural history. The kingdom in which the Sicilians wrote had not been formed *tabula rasa*, through an imposition of Christian cultural forms that annulled previous cultural formations in the region. Rather, the cultural life of the kingdom was articulated through a series of negotiations with a regional past that served to translate the cultural affiliations of the past or, where appropriate, to distance those affiliations.

The “Mozarabic” breviary inscribed with the first Italian vernacular text serves as a luscious example of the convergence of sameness and difference that accompanied the generation of vernacular cultures in the late Middle Ages. The manuscript was produced in a land characterized, even before the arrival of Muslim conquerors, by cultural complexity and linguistic difference. Transferred to the Italian peninsula, it was inscribed with an ephemeral text that has come to play a monumental role in the Italian historical imagination. The riddle that, in a moment of boredom or distraction, a scribe doodled in a margin of the manuscript symbolizes, for Italians, a boundary between the Italian and the non-Italian. It testifies to the existence of a differentiated regional linguistic identity in the dim prehistory of the Italian literary tradition, centuries before the emergence of a regional vernacular culture on the Italian peninsula. I begin this meditation on vernacularity in Sicily under the sign of the Indovinello Veronese because it exemplifies the long and circuitous route that Italian letters traveled on the way to becoming a true vernacular culture, because its marginality serves as a handsome illustration of the ephemerality of vernacular culture in general, and finally because the meandering provenance of the manuscript in which it is inscribed symbolizes the central importance of *difference* in the genesis of new vernacular cultures. Vernacular cultures are generated at the crossroads of cultures. Under the influence of contemporary political exigencies, nineteenth-century historians came to see the vernacular cultures of the late Middle Ages as the purest expression of modern national identities. But their birth was, by definition, attended by contingencies and complexities—an equivocal genesis, which early vernacular authors attempted to mitigate by producing literary histories and linguistic maps that might serve as an archeology of cultural identity.

* * *

The late Middle Ages saw a revolution in literary culture throughout the northern Mediterranean, as regional spoken languages were used for the first time as literary vehicles. The revolution was fought on a number of fronts, through a series of parallel literary movements: the Occitan, French, Catalan, Sicilian, and peninsular Italian poets, and even, in al-Andalus, the Arabic *zajal* poets. Awareness of linguistic difference formed a central component of the new literary traditions, as is attested in some of the most important medieval treatises on Romance versification. Berenguer d'Anoia and Raimon Vidal—both of whom wrote treatises on composition in Occitan, the language of the troubadours—as well as Dante, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, define the linguistic and literary tradition that is the subject of their study by opposing it to a plurality of comparable traditions. Each of these authors introduces his argument by sketching a map of parallel linguistic traditions, a brief but suggestive bit of stage dressing that situates the language he will discuss in the context of a broader linguistic and cultural terrain.

Raimon Vidal and Berenguer d'Anoia lived at the temporal and geographical extremes of the Occitan poetic movement and thus have a different relation to both the language and its literary tradition. Raimon Vidal wrote the *Razos de trobar*, the first grammatical work composed in and about a Romance vernacular language, between 1190 and 1213.⁶ He was a native Occitan speaker and lived in a region where Occitan was spoken. Mallorcan Berenguer d'Anoia wrote his *Mirall de trobar* during the closing years of the thirteenth century or the first quarter of the fourteenth century.⁷ This work was not only quite late—written a century later than the *Razos de trobar*, at roughly the same time as Dante's magisterial *De vulgari eloquentia*—but was also written by a non-native speaker, a Mallorcan, for the benefit of other non-native speakers.

Berenguer d'Anoia begins the *Mirall de trobar* with a common apocryphal account of the origins of the alphabet: he informs the reader that a nymph who lived on an island in the Sea of Sicily invented the first alphabet. Berenguer then describes the etymology of the word *alphabet*, “which comes from or is close to the Greek; in Hebrew it is called ‘alfabet,’ and in Arabic it is called ‘alifbet.’”⁸ Berenguer will not go into further detail regarding the Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic traditions. He uses them to provide a comparatist backdrop for his discussion of Occitan language and literature, tracing the Latinate tradition he will describe back to a Greek origin that has parallels in the Hebrew and Arabic-speaking worlds.

Near the beginning of Raimon Vidal's *Razos de trobar* we find a similar

comparatist formula. “All people, Christians, Jews, and Saracens, emperor, prince, king, duke, count . . . clergyman, burger, peasant, great or small, think every day about the composition and singing [of songs].”⁹ Like Berenguer, Raimon begins by sketching a broad panorama in order to provide a context for the particular matter he will discuss. The songs of the Jews and Saracens hold no further interest for him. Their relevance is exhausted once he has used them to demonstrate that the Occitan tradition of the Christians is but one among a number of parallel traditions.

In both of these cases, the author sketches a triad of literary-linguistic traditions as an evocation of a linguistic generality in order to set the stage for the linguistic particularity he will discuss. A similar citation of a triad of linguistic traditions as a sign of linguistic richness informed Peter of Eboli’s famous apostrophe to Palermo, the “trilingual” city (“fortunate city, endowed with a trilingual people”; see above, p. 53). Peter borrowed this epithet from Ovid and Apuleius; and Apuleius’s use of it demonstrates the rich nuances it conveyed. In the relevant passage of the *Metamorphoses*, a goddess appears to the protagonist. She introduces herself by listing a lengthy catalogue of the names by which she is known throughout the world. “The Sicilians,” she says, “who speak three tongues”—that is, Greek, Latin, and Punic—“call me Proserpine of the underworld” (*Met.* XI, 5). Here, again, the overarching theme is linguistic difference, and more precisely the spoken language as it differs from region to region. In this context, the Sicilians appear as an example of hyper-differentiation within the ambit of linguistic difference.

Ovid also describes Sicily as the land of three tongues (*Met.* XIII, 724). But he uses the word *linguae* to refer not to languages—the *spoken* tongue—but rather to mean a spit, an outcropping or “tongue” of land. Ovid’s layering of the possible meanings of the Latin word *lingua* grants his metaphor for Sicily a particular depth, evoking not only the notion of a *trilingual* Sicily, but also a visual image: the Trinacria. The Trinacria—the image of Medea’s face, framed by a triangle formed by three legs—visualized Sicily’s triangular shape, its three sides extending into three capes (see above, p. 53). The image was used during antiquity and the Middle Ages to represent not only Sicily’s physical outline, but also its historical connection with three mainland regions: the eastern Mediterranean, including the Near East and the Greek archipelago; the northern Mediterranean, consisting of the southern shores of Europe; and the southern Mediterranean, in particular Carthage or, during the Middle Ages, Qayrawan. These triadic designations for Sicily—the Trinacria, the land of three capes, the land of three languages—evoke at once the island’s shape and its role as a point where cultures converge (the Greek, the Latin, and the Punic; or the Greek, the Latin, and

the Arabic). They also denote the linguistic richness that resulted from that convergence.

It is perhaps for this reason that Dante uses the *Trinacria* as a designation for Sicily in his *De vulgari eloquentia*. The greatest of the vernacular treatises of the Middle Ages, the *De vulgari eloquentia* is generally heralded as the first work of Romance philology, or even as the first protomodern literary history. Dante himself signals his ambitious intentions through the breadth of the historical canvas on which he works. He invokes the first, Adamic language at the outset of his text, and then describes the Babelian outrage that generated the confusion of tongues of his own age. His discussion of the complex linguistic actuality of the present day, like Berenguer's and Raimon's, begins by sketching a trilingual context in which his work is to be situated. Dante tells us that the dual linguistic tradition he describes—a tradition that opposes a “natural” spoken language, the vernacular, to a learned formal language, the *grammatica*—is possessed by the Romans, the Greeks, “and others.” Modern scholars believe that Dante probably has in mind the Hebrew and Arabic traditions, the standard points of reference for medieval grammarians.¹⁰ Dante uses this gesture to set up a broad, comparatist spectrum within which he situates his own work. Following his reference to a triad of vernacular/*grammatica* traditions, he describes the triadic bifurcation of linguistic and literary traditions in the Christian world into northern (Germanic), southern (Romance), and eastern (Greek) branches. He details the further triadic ramification of the Romance branch into French, Occitan, and Italian families. Finally, when he turns to a discussion of linguistic variants within the Italian family, Dante leaves the rhythm of triplets behind. If you wish to calculate the number of dialects spoken by Italians, he says, you will find that “the number will reach a thousand, or even more” (*DVE* I, x, 9).

Dante's treatment of the Romance poetry of the Italian region begins with the Sicilians. He refers to Sicily as the “land of the *Trinacria*” (thus recalling the triadic keynote of his linguistic discussion):

But the fame of the Trinacrian land [*hec fama trinacrie terre*], if we perceive correctly where the signs lead, seems to inspire particular scorn for the Italian princes, who pursue their petty ambitions in the manner not of heroes but of commoners. The illustrious heroes, King Frederick and his good son Manfredi, manifested their splendid nobility and righteousness (for so long as fortune permitted), pursued whatever was refined, and scorned pettiness. Thus those noble in heart and endowed with grace strove to connect themselves with the majesty of these great princes, so that during their time whatever the excellence of the Italian spirit strove for appeared first in the court of these monarchs. And because the royal land was Sicily, it came to pass that whatever our predecessors produced in the vernacular was called Sicilian. We uphold this as well, and those who come after us will not be able to change it. (*DVE* I, xii, 4)

In this passage, Dante reassigned the meaning of the adjective *Sicilian*. It designates, in the words of Furio Brugnolo, “a precise politico-cultural context, and at the same time a chronological arc,” locating the poets both geographically and *temporally*.¹¹ Before the activities of the Sicilians, the lyric poets of the Italian peninsula had written in Occitan, borrowing both their language and their poetic style from the poets of the Pays d’Oc. The Sicilians’ poetry inspired imitators among mainland poets, who adopted the Sicilian vernacular and the Sicilian style. Modern literary historians use the term “Siculo-Tuscans” to refer to the peninsular imitators of the Sicilians, although recent scholarship has pointed out the collapsing of time and place, and the imposition of a subsequent literary-historical narrative, inherent in the use of this label as well.¹² In the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines the Sicilian literary movement (including the Sicilian poets of Frederick’s court and the peninsular poets who wrote in a Sicilianizing style) as the origins of Italian literary history, the hinge between the Occitan poets and the Italian poets of Dante’s own age. According to Dante, the Sicilians dominated Italian poetics until Dante’s generation, when a poetic movement based on the peninsula superceded them.

Dante’s narrative in the *De vulgari eloquentia* imposes a precise periodization on Italian literary history. During the first generation of this history, “whatever Italians write is called Sicilian” (*DVE* I, xii, 2). A subsequent generation, however—exemplified in the *De vulgari eloquentia* by Cino da Pistoia and “his friend” (that is, Dante himself)—would shift the center of gravity of the Italian literary tradition. The *Sicilian* literary tradition would be defined as *Italian* in retrospect, when a mainland tradition overshadowed the Sicilian poets. After the triumphant emergence of a peninsular Italian literary tradition, the Sicilian poets who had provided the initial impetus for this development could be designated Italian, but *differently* Italian. Sicilian was integrated into Dante’s literary historical narrative as a primordial form of Italian, and the Sicilians were recast as dialect poets, writing in a tongue defined by its difference from a norm that would emerge only subsequently.

* * *

The works of the poets known as the *scuola siciliana* have a secure position in Italian literature. They appear at the beginning of any thorough anthology of the Italian tradition, preceded only—in the *very* thorough collections—by works dubious both in terms of their Italianicity and their literary merit: the Indovinello Veronese, for instance; or devotional poems midway between prayers and truly literary works, such as the “Ritmo Laurenziano,” the “Ritmo

Cassinese,” or the “Ritmo su sant’Alessio.” The Italian word for the Romance poetry that prefigures the *dolce stil novo* poets and the emergence of a true Italian literary tradition during the late thirteenth century is *le origini*, “the origins.” And Sicilian poets initiate *le origini*. In a chronological as well as a geographical sense, they are liminal, marking the boundary between what is Italian and what is not. This role as spatial and temporal Janus was granted to the Sicilians, already, in Dante’s treatment of them in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, which served, to a great extent, to determine the way their poetry would be read by subsequent generations. (And Dante himself intuited as much in the passage quoted above: “We uphold this as well, *and those who come after us will not be able to change it.*”) For Dante, the label “Sicilian” specified a geographic designation that reveals itself on closer scrutiny to be a chronological designation. He read the Sicilians as “Italians *ante litteram*”—those who wrote Italian literature before the poets of Dante’s generation emerged to define the Italian language and the course of Italian letters.

But a certain amount of effort was required in order to position the Sicilians as (in Dante’s words) “li primi che dissero in lingua di ‘sì’”—the first who wrote in Italian (*Vita nuova* XXV). The language of the Sicilians’ proto-Italian poetry presented extraordinary difficulties for a contemporary audience. Preserved (with the exception of a meager handful of verses) in manuscripts made in Tuscany, they went through a process of linguistic normalization that smoothed over their Sicilianisms, familiarizing their sounds and vocabulary for a Tuscan audience. During the sixteenth century, philologist Giovanni Maria Barbieri copied Stefano Protonotaro’s “Pir meu cori allegrari,” along with some verses by Re Enzo, into the endpapers of a book in his library—another marginal text! These versions of the poems were, for years, celebrated as being closer to the poet’s own words (the *original* “origini”) than any other known manuscript versions.¹³ Barbieri, it should be noted, was among the early proponents of the “Arabic thesis.” In his *Dell’origine della poesia rimata* he produced the first extended philological defense of the theory that Arabic poetics had a formative influence on early Romance lyric—hence his interest in the poets of thirteenth-century Sicily. But the Sicilians’ contemporaries had no comparable interest in the suggestive exoticism of the Sicilian poetic tongue. Rather, they required a text that could serve them as the basis for their own poetic activities. And the distance between Tuscany and the Kingdom of Sicily justified their translation (or “Tuscanization,” as it has become known) of the Sicilian works they copied. Eccentricities remain in the Tuscanized texts—slant rhymes, unfamiliar words—and one presumes that these rough edges added to the exotic pleasure of the works for the manuscripts’ refined audience. The Sicilians had translated the conventions

of the Occitan and French poets into a vernacular that was closer to home. This tongue would be refined, retranslated, in order to serve as a model for the generation of Cavalcanti and Dante.

In a sense, of course, Dante was perfectly right in his analysis of Sicilian poetry. The Sicilian movement was given impetus by a sense of regional specificity. But its place in history contributed an essential momentum to the poets' activities. Preexisting Romance vernacular poetic movements had established the basic ground rules for the writing of love poetry in the spoken tongue. The Sicilians made canny use of those movements, translating and responding to them with perspicacity. And the new literature emerged on fertile ground, terrain prepared by Sicilian history. The Sicilian state, by habit, looked out toward other regions and imported and reacted to important cultural developments that occurred beyond its boundaries. Furthermore, the extinction of Arabic as a spoken tongue during the first decades of the thirteenth century divested the state of the linguistic tradition that had served poets of the previous generation. The Sicilians' poetry responded to the exigencies of their historical moment, addressing in particular two linguistico-literary lacunae in their immediate cultural environment. It translated the Romance vernacular tradition into an Italianate vernacular, providing a linguistic template and sketching a poetic tradition for the poets of the Italian peninsula. And it replaced the Arabic literary tradition of Norman Sicily. Dante acknowledges the significance of the Sicilians' *historical* intervention when he defines the Sicilian movement as an expression of a *genius temporis* as well as a *genius loci*.

Finally, the Sicilians' most decisive contribution to literary history appears not in the *content* of their poetry, but rather its *medium*. The Romance poets' innovations would prove immensely important for subsequent literary history. But (with the stunning exception of the invention of the sonnet) these were essentially conservative modifications of an inherited poetic tradition, limitations of the field of poetic play. The Sicilian poetry marks its difference from previous poetic traditions chiefly in the invention of a new language for poetry, a language that would prove immensely important to literary history in the decades following the Sicilians' activities. Of course, this language itself is one of the most ephemeral aspects of the poetry; Tuscanization has irretrievably changed the Sicilians' eloquence. Precisely how much touch-up the poets' language underwent is a matter of some dispute. An earlier generation of critics assumed that it had been subjected to a radical Tuscanization and strove to reconstruct the dialect in which it had been composed. Their attempts to recreate the lost Sicilian original of the texts that have come down to us served to accentuate the designation of the Sicilian literary tradition as

other, as scholarship on medieval Sicilian poetry came to resemble phonetic or lexical studies, composed of descriptions of etymological difference, rather than proper readings. Thus, the author of one of the earliest monographs on the Sicilian poets interrupts his 450-page *literary* study of the poets' works with a 144-page *linguistic* excursus on morphology and syntax.¹⁴ But this approach has lost favor. Recent scholarship tends to downplay the severity of Tuscanization, and certainly, with changing intellectual fashions, the goal of reconstructing the lost text has come to seem less tantalizing.¹⁵

Sicilian literary history demonstrates the central importance that linguistic difference plays in the genesis of vernacular traditions. The generation of new vernacular literary movements during the Middle Ages typically occurred when preexisting linguistico-literary traditions proved insufficient to express an immediate cultural reality. Thus, in the evolution of a new vernacular tradition, the *other* (a historical tradition—the culture of the *grammatica*; or an imported contemporary cultural tradition) preexisted the *self* (a contemporary, indigenous culture). Vernacular literatures emerged through negotiations between established textual traditions and indigenous cultural verities. They translated literary tradition into a regional spoken tongue. And they translated contemporary indigenous cultural verities, and a regional spoken tongue that had not previously possessed a cognate literary language, into the forms dictated by established literary practice. Through this process, the vernacular poets mapped themselves in relation to literary history and contemporary literary practice, differentiating themselves from the (historical or geographical) other.

The written record of Sicilian literary history, produced in negotiation between literary conventions and contemporary cultural actuality, preserves (like all medieval vernacular literatures) a contingent and partial portrait of that cultural actuality. Any number of the cartilages that connect historical event to its textual traces have vanished: not only the original sound of the written signs, but also the original written text itself; the poems' musical settings, if indeed there were any; and most importantly, the ephemeral cultural life that characterized the state in which they were produced and to which they responded. It seems apparent that the Sicilian Romance poets responded to two cultural influences in particular. Modern literary historians have emphasized their indebtedness to Romance poetics in general, and to Occitan lyric and French epic in particular. The readings in this study highlight another dimension of Sicilian poetics: an engagement with the kingdom's cultural constitution, and in particular with the interpenetration of Muslim and Christian cultures in Sicily, that is apparent both in the works of the Sicilians and in their contemporaries' response to Sicilian cultural formations.

There is no reason to believe that the Sicilians used Arabic models for their poetic practice or (*pace* Barbieri) to impute a genetic relation between Romance and Arabic poetics in Sicily. Sicilian poets did not acknowledge the Arabs as avatars, as they did—persistently—acknowledge the influence of the Occitan and French poets. At the same time, it is unlikely that the Sicilians would assert their investment in an environment that mingled the cultures of Muslims and Christians. The Sicilians wrote during an age of increasing tension between the two cultural realms, when growing Christian hegemony in southern Europe compelled Christians to assert the difference and the autonomy of Christian cultural practices. If they were to acknowledge Arabic culture, they would be more likely to do so—as Giacomo did—by citing works of natural philosophy that had been translated and naturalized by Christian scholars. They might, as Giacomo seems to do in “Amor non vole,” evoke artifacts associated with the Arabic world with a wink and a (slightly world-weary) nudge. Again, they might—as Cielo d’Alcamo seems to do—place references to the fabulous wealth of the Oriental world in the mouth of a woman, who speaks in a voice at once saucy and naïve. Another telling reference to contemporary Arabic culture appears in a poem by Guido delle Colonne, “Amor che lungamente m’ài menato” (“Love, which long has led me”).¹⁶ In this poem, the lover compares himself to an “assessino asorcuitato” (v. 7)—a fanatical assassin. The word *assassin*, of course, refers to the mythical Islamic warrior cult, rumored to have arisen in the Levant during the twelfth century, whose leader rewarded his followers’ murderous exploits with pharmacologically assisted glimpses of heaven. The word had entered European languages by the early thirteenth century. But other authors used it with a negative connotation. Thus, in a letter condemning Frederick II, and in the context of detailing his nefarious associations with Saracens, Pope Innocent IV accuses Frederick of deploying *Assassins* (“fecit per Assassinos occidi”) against a Christian opponent.¹⁷ And Dante would describe a particularly murderous denizen of hell as “lo perfido assassin” (*Inferno* XIX, 50). Guido’s use of the word in a positive context—his devotion to his lady, he tells us, has transformed him into a “fanatical assassin”—suggests a less Manichean understanding of Islamic culture, an ability to produce a value-neutral reading of that culture that was not available to those who lived at a greater distance from it.

An earlier generation of cultural historians—the Enlightenment and romantic historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—asserted an understanding of the cultural transits of the late Middle Ages similar to the one I am sketching here. Thus, for instance, Juan Andrés, an eighteenth-century Jesuit and scholar of prodigious ambition—he is the author of a

book called *Dell'origine, de' progressi, e dello stato attuale d'ogni letteratura*, no less—cautions against positing a genetic relation between Arabic and Romance poetics. But he also affirms the possibility of a more general cultural exchange between Muslim and Christian populations: “It's not that the sources of our eloquence and poetry arose from Arabic schools, nor that their books were models for our poets and orators; but their example of writing poetry and of writing amusing things in a language native to and understood by all could perhaps have quickened in Europeans the thought of cultivating similar studies, and of earning the applause of their countrymen by stirring up the imagination and instructing the mind, while writing in a tongue common to them.”¹⁸ And Michele Amari, the Sicilian scholar of Siculo-Muslim history, repeats Andrés's intuition that the cultural communications between Muslims and Christians were not the sort that would leave an explicit trace in the form of direct borrowings: “The manner alone—I believe—of the splendid Muslim courts of Spain carried into the Christian castles of the West, along with other luxurious notions, the pleasing habit of listening to poetry in the local vernacular tongue: prizes and honors encouraged national poets to recite in princely gatherings those verses that one heard before in the obscure street-songs of the cities and the countryside; so that vernacular poetry, more than *born*, one should say was *emancipated* and *ennobled* during that period.”¹⁹ Amari's romantic nationalist sensibilities are apparent, here, in his assertion that the learned poetry of the Middle Ages was popular in origin, and in particular in his reference to the *national* poets who gathered at a sovereign's request to share (or rather, emancipate and ennable) the poetry of the city streets and the countryside. Nonetheless, his central perception of the relation between Arabic and Romance poetics—his intuition that the communications between the two cultures was broad and general in scope, and the suggestion that, for that reason, positivistic research would not reveal its traces—is close to the sensibility of medieval literary scholarship of the early twenty-first century. Even more suggestive in this context, though more tentative, is Amari's implicit identification of an *alternate* origin for Italian culture in Norman ventriloquism of Arabic cultural institutions. Amari recognizes the hybridity of Sicilian culture as a productive difficulty, a provocation that generated dynamic cultural syntheses. But both the conceptual vocabulary and the nationalist sentiments of nineteenth-century scholarship prevented him from undertaking a fuller interrogation of the “seeds of that wondrous civilization of our common fatherland” that the Normans carried from the Islamic Mediterranean to the Italian peninsula.²⁰

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on the literary relations between Arabic and Romance poetics typically formulated the question of

influence central to that scholarship in more dialectical terms than either Amari or Andrés did. It typically sought to determine whether the Romance poets—as Christians, as Europeans, as proto-Italians or proto-Frenchmen or proto-Spaniards—knew and were influenced by the works of Arab poets. But it seems that this formulation may impose an anachronistic sectarian and national taxonomy on the cultural environment of the late Middle Ages. In the northern Mediterranean, the Muslim and Christian worlds interpenetrated each other to the extent that it becomes difficult to talk about two discrete, separate worlds. Rather, it seems more appropriate to characterize the cultural environment of the era as a shared Mediterranean culture—with certain characteristics specific to either the Muslim or the Christian spheres, as well as a substantial body of common material—in the process of separating itself into two clearly defined cultural spheres. Literary historians must be sensitive to the nuances of Muslim-Christian cultural relations during the late Middle Ages when we approach the question of literary and broader cultural influences. We may understand cross-cultural influence in medieval literary history better if we consider it not as a question of competition between two distinct cultures, but rather as a step in the process of differentiation between two cultural realms that did not yet understand themselves to be autonomous, separate and distinct. It is appropriate to talk about cross-cultural borrowings and cross-cultural competitions only when there is a clearly defined distinction between two cultures. If that distinction has not yet been made explicit, contact between cultural spheres may be expressed differently: through competition and imitation, but also through cultural accommodation, willful ignorance of another culture, or willful translation of that culture's assets into a form that may serve as a foundation for new cultural formations.

Ibn Khaldun, the great fourteenth-century Andalusian historian, wrote a lengthy preface to his massive history that represents the most significant historiographical study between Augustine's *City of God* and Giambattista Vico's *New Science*. That work—known simply as *al-Muqaddima*, the “Introduction” to the history—ends with a discussion of Arabic literature. The treatment of literature concludes with a consideration of two vernacular poetic forms, the *muwashshaha* and the *zajal*, which had emerged in al-Andalus some four centuries earlier and spread thence to other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. Ibn Khaldun asserts the validity and the beauty of vernacular poetry—challenging the chauvinism of Arab litterateurs, who hold that vernacular poetry is by definition inferior to the classical tradition. He catalogues the regional variants of this form as it spread across the Mediterranean to the Maghreb and the Levant. Like Raimon's, Berenguer's, and

Dante's treatises on vernacular poetics, his account of the new poetic forms takes a comparatist turn in order to account for the plurality of vernacular traditions that emerged in the late medieval moment, that coexisted for some time, and that commented on and responded to each other. And his history of vernacular poetics—and thus *al-Muqaddima* itself—ends with a Qur'anic citation celebrating linguistic and cultural difference: "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and your colors, there are signs for those who understand" (Qur'an 30:22).²¹ Ibn Khaldun, like Dante, Berenguer, and Raimon, affirms difference as a productive difficulty. He recognizes it as a means by which regional poets might distinguish themselves and communicate their regional difference both to other regional poets and, symbolically, to literary history.

By considering the Sicilian poets of the thirteenth century in the context of a broader project of vernacularization we gain a more nuanced understanding of their intervention in literary history. And by reading them against the history of Christian conquest in the northern Mediterranean, and the parallel history of Muslim-Christian cultural exchange, we produce a fuller account of the cultural environment in which they lived and to which their poetic project responded. This is not to say that vernacular movements in al-Andalus, the Pays d'Oc, Sicily, and the Italian mainland were identical. But the different trajectories of vernacular literary history in these regions may be telling. The Andalusian poetic experiment, for instance, failed. The *muwash-shaha* did not transform Arabic poetics as vernacular lyric poetry would in the Christian territories of the northern Mediterranean. The Norman Sicilian experiment, which paralleled *grammatica* traditions and deployed them for distinct purposes, also failed. The Romance Sicilian intervention, in contrast, succeeded, although the Sicilians' initiative would be linguistically modified by mainland poets in order to serve as the foundation for a subsequent cultural formation.

Roberto Antonelli, discussing the Tuscanization of the poetry of *le origini*, points out that such linguistic normalization "is customary in manuscript practice, but not for this reason less significant as the formal pretext of an anthology that inaugurates a new literary tradition."²² The Tuscanization of the Sicilian poets should be read in the context of a broader trend, an aggressive project of differentiation between the Christian and Islamic cultural spheres, and cultural consolidation within the Christian world. As one of its goals, this project aimed to lay claim to the sophisticated cultural productions of the Arabs, chiefly through the importation and naturalization of Islamic philosophy and cultural forms. It would be misleading to impute intentionality or personal agency to a long and complex process that involved

intellectuals, artists, secular and religious rulers, artisans, and militia, and that resulted from and in turn supported the gradual increase of Christian hegemony in the northern Mediterranean. And yet, the Sicilian biographies and vignettes in this study demonstrate how individual lives and careers contributed to an end that would prove significant in retrospect. The Sicilians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries *did* function, in this sense, as an avant-garde: they operated on the front lines of the battles between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. They translated Arabic cultural formations into a Christian, and ultimately a Romance, vernacular. But their implication in the heterodoxies of their environment necessitated the acts of recuperation—the “translations” of the Sicilians and their texts—that a subsequent generation would undertake, in order to differentiate *themselves* from Sicily and its equivocal history.

* * *

Between the beginning of the twelfth century and the midpoint of the thirteenth century, the Kingdom of Sicily evolved from a culture of accommodation—which asserted a relatively aggressive distinction between (Christian) self and (Muslim) other, but at the same time integrated the cultural forms of the populations present in the kingdom—to the containment and eradication of difference, and the naturalization of the other’s culture. Frederick II would deport the Muslims of Sicily to a ghetto city on the mainland. That Muslim colony would be wiped out by the Angevin ruler of Sicily at the beginning of the fourteenth century.²³ Sicily would be remade, by Angevin and then Aragonese monarchs, as an unproblematically Christian state. The years of Muslim domination and the culture of fusion between Muslim and Christian elements created when the kingdom was an independent state seemed to leave few traces. Michele Amari would lament, in the closing pages of his monumental history of Muslim Sicily, that the Arabs had left little more than a tenuous onomastic and culinary record of their presence on the island.

And yet a late chapter in the career of one of the most remarkable intellectuals of the Middle Ages demonstrates the extent to which Sicily did retain an image in the medieval imagination as a place where the Muslim and Christian worlds met. Ramon Llull was born in Majorca in about 1232, three years after the Christian conquest of Muslim Majorca, in which his father had been a participant. In his autobiography, the *Vita coetanea*, Llull tells us that he was a frivolous young man who wrote love poetry in the troubadour style. At the age of thirty, he had an extraordinary experience that led to his

conversion. As he sat down to write a poem to a lady “whom he loved with a foolish love,” Llull had a vision of Christ crucified. He put the poem aside, picked it up later, and the vision was repeated. Finally, after a week of repetitions of the experience, Llull accepted its significance and was converted from erotic love for a lady to a Christian love of God.²⁴ Following his conversion, inspired by the example of St. Francis, he sold his possessions and went on a series of pilgrimages. He then settled on the mission to which he would devote the rest of his life: the conversion of the Muslims to Christianity. In order to achieve this goal, he spent nine years in Majorca (1265–74) learning Arabic with an Arab slave whom he had bought to serve as tutor. At the same time, he studied Latin and Christian theology, as well as Islamic philosophy and theology. He aimed to convert the Muslims by speaking to them in their own language, literally and figuratively. He believed that persuasion would prove a more efficacious means to achieve the goal of conversion than the brutal martial methods employed by the crusaders. He would use the sophisticated tools of Islamic philosophy, as well as the Arabic language, to demonstrate to Muslims the intellectual superiority of Christian belief.

In 1313, at the end of a long and productive career—Llull wrote some three hundred works in Latin, Catalan, and Arabic; he established programs for the study of the Arabic language at a number of European universities, and himself taught in Paris, Montpellier, and Naples—his dream of converting the Muslims brought him to Sicily. He was drawn there by the reputation of the Aragonese king of Sicily, Frederick III, who was the son of Manfredi’s daughter Constance. Despite his somewhat vague and vacillating stance on religious affairs, Frederick had demonstrated that he was eager to partake in the spirit of religious reform of the age. Like his namesake, he was willing to oppose the pope and the church hierarchy. Thus his Sicily became a refuge for Franciscans who had run into problems with church officials on the Italian mainland. And like that earlier Frederick he worked toward the containment of religious minorities in his kingdom. He promulgated acts designed to isolate the Jews of Sicily from the Christian community and promoted the conversion of Saracen and Greek slaves in Sicily to the Roman faith. Llull must have been attracted in particular by rumors of Frederick’s plans for a school to teach Christian missionaries the Arabic language so that they could promote the conversion of the Muslims. He traveled to Sicily with a rough game plan, sketched out in a pamphlet he wrote just before departing from Majorca, the *Liber de participatione christianorum et saracenorum*, for a series of summit meetings between Muslims and Christians. Llull’s plan called for a contingent of Christian intellectuals who spoke Arabic to travel to Tunisia, where they would meet and debate with Muslim intellectuals. Then a group

of Muslim scholars would come to Sicily for a second round of conversations. Llull's pamphlet outlines a series of talking points that will guide the Christians in championing the Christian cause.

Llull remained in Sicily, in the city of Messina, for less than a year. He failed to attract the attention and support of Frederick III and returned to Majorca before the end of 1313. The last of the works he wrote during his stay in Messina deplores the corruption of the world and expresses Llull's disappointment and disillusionment at the failure of his Sicilian experiment. The *Liber de civitate mundi* is a visionary text, in which Llull imagines himself traveling outside the corrupt city of this world and listening to a series of monologues spoken by the virtues and divine powers. One of them, Faith, speaks in Llull's voice when she complains about the inability of the world to recognize the vital importance of her activities:

There are lazy men who do not care that I preach and testify to the infidels, and who say: It is not fitting to preach and testify the faith to them; when it pleases God, the infidels will be converted to the holy Catholic faith. There was a great controversy between me and a certain very lazy and very greedy prelate on this subject. He said that it was too hard a labor for a Christian to learn the Arabic language, and too much work and too great a risk to go preaching the Gospel to unbelievers throughout the world. I replied: Poor man, it is clear from your words that you are slothful. Sloth is that inclination that makes a man hate the good and love the evils of his neighbor, because he is lethargic, and lazy, and opposes the end for which he was created.²⁵

From Sicily, Llull traveled to Majorca. In 1314–15 he was in Tunis. Despite the prevalent medieval legend that he was martyred in Tunis, scholars now believe that he probably returned to Majorca and died there of natural causes early in 1316.

Llull's career, and particularly the role that Sicily played in one of the final chapters of that career, serves as a fitting codicil to the equivocal culture of accommodation and exclusion created in the Kingdom of Sicily. By the time that Llull arrived in Sicily the state had been fully Christianized. Nevertheless, Sicily retained its image—at least in the imagination of intellectuals like Llull—as a place where substantive communications between Christians and Muslims could be staged.

The process of distinguishing between Christian self and Muslim other played a crucial role in the articulation of Christian culture during the late Middle Ages. In the earliest edition of his seminal book *Orientalism*, Edward Said would characterize competitions between Muslims and Christians in the Middle Ages as one-sided exchanges between a subject occupying a tactically superior position (the Christian camp) and an abject and powerless *other* (the

Muslim camp). More recently, medieval historians have reread the historical and literary record to add a dimension of nuance to Said's central intuition of a culture of competition between Muslims and Christians.²⁶ During the late Middle Ages, Muslim and Christian culture negotiated a complex transition as the balance of power between them shifted. At the end of this process the Christian world would indeed emerge as the more powerful player on an international stage. But when it began, Muslims held the superior position in aesthetic, technological, and intellectual spheres. Thus the era generated relations between the two, at some moments, of opposition and contest. But at others contact between cultures was characterized by exchange and aggressive borrowing of cultural practices. And at some moments—in twelfth-century Sicily, for instance—cultural practices were formed through synthesis of Christian and Muslim elements. In such cases, the two cultures interpenetrated to the extent that it becomes difficult to classify them as one or the other, as unproblematically Christian or Islamic.

An anonymous scholar, working in either Sicily or Spain around the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth, produced a telling monument to the cultural miscegenations of his age: a marginal text, inscribed in the flyleaf of a collection of biblical commentaries, describing a visit to the afterworld and the conditions of the souls he finds there.²⁷ The text is Christian—or at least nominally Christian. It is broadly informed by Islamic theology and philosophy, suggesting that its author was either a convert to Christianity or a scholar immersed in the Islamicizing environment of the philosophical circles of Toledo or of Palermo. It seems to occupy a medial position between the popular Islamic text describing the prophet Muhammad's journey to the afterworld—known in Arabic as the *Kitab al-Mi'raj*, the “Book of the Ladder,” and translated into Latin, Catalan, and French during the thirteenth century—and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. A century later, Ramon Llull—another intellectual actively engaged with both Islamic and Christian philosophical traditions—would imagine a very different kind of contact between those two traditions. Llull, like the anonymous author of the visionary text, negotiated between the vocabulary and the beliefs of Muslims and Christians. But the aim of his project is different, and so his methodologies and his activities differ. By Llull's day, the two cultural spheres had succeeded to a large extent in differentiating themselves from each other. Christians had gained control of much of the Muslim-occupied territory in southern Europe, through military conquest, and much of the Islamic philosophical tradition, through translation. Llull conceives himself as exporter of the culture and the beliefs of the Christian world. He aims to deploy these tools to achieve the intellectual and religious conquest of the Muslims.

Thus the anonymous author of the visionary text and Llull stand at two extremes in a process of cultural transition, exemplifying in the first case the importation and naturalization of Muslim cultural practices by a Christian author, and in the second case the arrogation of Muslim cultural practices by a Christian author in an attempt to dominate a Muslim object. The readings of Sicilian culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in general, and of the Romance poetry of the thirteenth century in particular, in this book situate them in the context of the transition between these two stances. Sensitivity to the cultural dynamic of the world in which they were produced restores to their work a sense of its riskiness, and of the contingency at the origins of the vernacular literary tradition in Italy—and indeed at the origins of medieval vernacular traditions in general.



San Giovanni degli Eremiti, Palermo. The red domes of a Norman-era church, viewed from the cloister gardens. (Author's photo)

Texts in Translation

From the Arabic

IBN HAMDIS

(*‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn Hamdis*)

Ibn Hamdis (ca. 1056–1133), the premier Arab poet of Sicily and one of the greatest Arab poets of the Middle Ages, was sixteen years old when the Normans took Palermo. He left Sicily in 1078/79 and spent the rest of his life in al-Andalus and Tunisia, leaving the former for the latter after the Almoravids defeated and deposed his Andalusian sponsor, al-Mu’tamid. The best-known and best-loved of his poems are his *qasidas* (or *odes*) remembering Sicily: the *Siqilliyyat*. In the first of the two *Siqilliyyat* translated below, Ibn Hamdis uses the language typical of Arabic wine poetry, remembering a night of drunken revelry from his boyhood; the poem begins and ends with tender and anguished reflections on nostalgia for his lost homeland, a keynote of his poetry. In the second, the poet draws on the images and rhythms of traditional battle poetry to evoke and lament Sicily’s fall to the Normans.

SOURCE: Ibn Hamdis, *Diwan Ibn Hamdis*, 180–82

In youth, the soul attains its desire
but old age admonishes it¹

To be sure, the lot of desire was cast
and my soul was divided into tenths

And whatever time planted in the earth
as seedlings, time was sure to harvest

In war, I have used up the instruments [of war];
at the same time, I have prepared myself for the burdens of peace

Oh blackish red [wine], and the youth
it makes merry, when he passes the glass during playtime²

5

1. In all translations of poetry from the Arabic, I have translated each Arabic line as a couplet and each hemistich as a line.

2. This line marks the transition from the opening—a lament for lost youth—to the *khamriyya*, or wine song. Ibn Hamdis skillfully melds the vocabulary of the wine song with another set piece: poetry in praise of horses. In this line, he uses a word meaning blackish red (*kumaytan*), used by poets to describe “both a sturdy horse and a robust wine” (William Granara, “Remaking Muslim Sicily,” 184). In the next line, he compares the cup that serves the wine from the wine jug to a racing horse, evoking both the drinkers’ prodigious pace and the cup’s circular

The cup drinks from the wine jug:
you imagine it were a race track

Ah, the barmaid: her hand encircles
the neck of the gazelle with rings³

Her hand, shining like a gem, passes around the shining wine;
she submerges its flames in water⁴

Ah, the group of true friends, like luminous stars:
their nature is noble and free

They pass the wine; the gleaming cups overflow,
brightening the darkness of night

10

as if the wine were a woven surface
and its bubbles were nets entrapping birds⁵

Ah, the nun who bolts the convent door:
we were her visitors for the night

The fragrance of liquor led us to her—
it made her secrets known to your nose

No youth will win the musk, save him
who makes his way to Darin, or to her abode⁶

It is as if her musk bags were
two wine jugs, enclosing pitch

15

I cast a dirham on her scales;
from the wine jug, she poured dinars⁷

journey from vessel to mouth. The young man introduced in this line will feature prominently in the drinking scene, as a symbol of youthful spirit and vitality. He should, of course, be understood as an image of Ibn Hamdis himself in his youth.

3. In this line, the gazelle may represent either the festive youth—the poet, remembering himself as a vital young man—being embraced by the barmaid, or the wineskin, which is the tool of the barmaid's trade, and which is sealed with a ring-like stopper.

4. The flames are red wine, which the barmaid mixes with water.

5. The revelers are drinking a sparkling wine; the birds represent the youthful exuberance produced by the wine.

6. Darin is a city in present-day Saudi Arabia, once a destination for ships bearing musk from India and Ceylon. The poet plays on the phonetic echoes between the words "Darin" and "daraha," *her abode*.

7. Dirhams and dinars were the basic units of Arabian currency. Gold dinars were worth many times more than the silver dirhams.

We proposed to her four daughters⁸
so that pleasure might strip them of their virginity—

maidens from among such as all but outstrip
the lifespan of luminous stars⁹

Her brides show you their long-fingered
hands that lightly touch their waists

He detects the scent of her perfume—
he is expert in physiognomy—so he chooses her

20

A youth who has studied wine until he knows
the prime of the wines, and their vintage

He counts for any kind of wine you wish
its age, and he knows the wine merchant

We return to the wineglass: it fixes
young flowers upon the supple limbs of the tree¹⁰

When he sees anxieties arise in wine,
the king of pleasure slays them with wine

The singers have allayed the movements of distress
by moving the strings of their instruments

25

This one, bending over her lute, embraces it
and that one kisses her flute

Ah, the dancer—her leg lifts from the ground
matching the hand of the other, who drums her tambourine,

like pale yellow candlesticks—
she shows you their flowery flames

as if they had columns set in order:
justice has created balance among their parts¹¹

8. Here, the poet plays on a figurative meaning of the word “daughters”: in wine poetry, the word can signify “daughter of the grape,” or “wine.”

9. The aged daughters, of course, are vintage wines.

10. Ibn Hamdis refers to a sort of tree (the *ban*) that is often used as the image of a slender and vital youth.

11. The “columns” are at once the evenly arrayed limbs of the dancing girls and a symbol of something larger. In this and the following two lines, the poet makes a transition between the central description of the poem—a memory of a night of youthful revelry in Sicily—and the

She lifts the darkness from its heads [or summits]
and parts its veils with her light

30

as if we gave her mastery over its fates
and its lifespan is brought to an end

I remember Sicily, and my grief
is awakened by remembering her¹²

The abode of youthful pleasures stands empty
and its residents were a people of elegance

But if I have been driven out of paradise
then let me still recount its story

If weeping were not salt water,
I would think my tears were a river

35

At twenty, I laughed with youthful pleasures
at sixty, I cry for her burdens¹³

But do not make the offenses more grievous within yourself
since your Lord does not cease to forgive them

SOURCE: Ibn Hamdis, *Diwan Ibn Hamdis*, 274–76

He said, remembering Sicily and his home, Syracuse:

Because of long-lasting grief, we drive our camels
and their legs bear us through the wide open spaces

They frighten the wild cows straying in the desert
whose glances remind us of young ladies' eyes

closing lament for his lost homeland. He is nominally describing the dancing girls, but his language becomes increasingly abstract and generalized in these three lines. The feminine possessive pronoun that ends each line in the original Arabic text (and that can have a plural masculine as well as a feminine referent) seems, in these lines, to refer as much to Sicily as to the more obvious grammatical referents, the dancing girls. *Sicily's* regions are brought into balance by justice; darkness lifts from the land—from the summits of *Sicily*—and the veil of darkness rises, as the night of revelry comes to a close; and in verse 31, the dancing girl, now transformed into a personification of divine intention, has mastery over *Sicily's* fates and *Sicily's* lifespan.

12. In the closing lines of the poem, the poet brings his idyllic memory of his Sicilian youth to an end by returning to the present: exile has extinguished his “youthful pleasures” (a term he uses twice in these closing lines). The feminine possessive pronoun that closes each of the lines of this *qasida* refers to Sicily in four of the next five lines.

13. The last word of this line—which can mean “burdens” or “crimes”—also appeared as the last word in line 4 of this *qasida*.

Virgins, you see their marvelous beauty, as if
they were the type and original of their species

My critic! allow me to set loose my tears:
in moments of the most exquisite patience, I still find nothing to obstruct them

I am a man harboring a sorrow that
pricks me at the core of my heart

5

I believed that my land would return to her people—
but my beliefs have become a torment to me; I have grown hopeless

I console my soul, since I see my land
fighting a losing battle against a venomous enemy

What else, when she has been shamed, when the hands
of the Christians have turned her mosques into churches?

Whenever they wish, the monks strike, and the land fills—
morning and evening—with the sound of church bells¹⁴

No medicine was able to cure her—
but also how much rust on the sword, how it tires the polisher!

10

Oh, Sicily! Destiny has deceived her
and she had protected the people of her time

How many are the eyes made sleepless by fear
that had been lulled to sleep by safety?

I see my nation—the Christians have imposed disgrace upon it
when once its glory was firmly established by my people

And the nation of infidels was once clothed in fear of her,
but now she is clad in the armor of fear of them

I no longer see the Arab lions among them
and in their hands you would see the unbelievers become prey

15

Oh my eye, you have not seen their like—squadrons
of war heroes in battle trampling their enemy¹⁵

14. *Naqus*: literally, wooden sticks that the monks knock against each other to call worshippers to church services.

15. Ibn Hamdis returns in memory to the days of the *Arab* conquest, two and one-half centuries earlier, when Arab warriors launched successful raids against Christians in Sicily.

How many a shining sword! You imagine them
radiant shooting stars in the thick of the night

Standing out among the sword-edges of the armored warriors
he cuts the helmets from the horsemen

I never imagined that the heat of fire might cool
when it falls upon the palm leaves in the arid heat of summer

Was Calabria not filled with Arab raiders?
Did they not annihilate the audacious Christian generals there? 20

It was they who opened its gates with their swords
and left its lights like darkest night

Their hands drive on the prisoners of war, white and uncovered:
you imagine them wearing cloaks of hair¹⁶

They plunge into the sea, every season, toward them—
a sea whose waves are horsemen

Their battle ships shoot Greek fire
and the smell of death descends upon the enemies' noses

You see the machines of war with red and yellow caps
like negro girls married off as brides 25

When ovens smoke in the land
you imagine them rivals of volcanoes¹⁷

Is there in Qasrin¹⁸ any patch of land they still inhabit?
Or has every trace of Islam been obliterated?¹⁹

Among the wonders that the devils have wrought,
they have burned the houses of the zodiac to the ground

Syracuse became a stronghold for the Christians;
in its monasteries they visit their tombs

16. The reference is to female prisoners of war, unveiled and humiliated in defeat.

17. The ovens are *tannour*: round clay griddles; the fire is lit beneath them and bread placed on the convex surface to bake. Ibn Hamdis compares the hilly land, besieged by ships shooting Greek fire, to these ovens. The reference to volcanoes, of course, recalls Sicily's famous volcano, Etna.

18. Italian Castrogiovanni, a city in eastern Sicily.

19. Here, Ibn Hamdis returns to the present, and to the Muslims' defeat. He imagines (contrary to actuality) his own town, Syracuse, to be the site of the Muslims' last stand against the Christian invaders.

They march through a land whose people are below the earth
and have not encountered among them a proud and
war-experienced person

30

And if those tombs were to split open, scowling
lions would arise from the graves

But I have seen the lion's covert; when the lion is absent
jackals prance and strut in the pride lands

These two brief love poems show Ibn Hamdis writing in a different, and gentler, mode. In the first poem, he plays on an element often associated with the beloved: her soothing beauty, exemplified by the cool, dark kohl of her eyes. This desirable quality is contrasted to the devastating effect of the heat of her rejection. At the end of the poem—which, like many medieval Romance love poems, depicts love as a sickness—the poet has been so reduced by longing that he no longer has the strength to raise himself from his sickbed and admire the beloved's beauty. And in the second poem, Ibn Hamdis again draws on the image of love as a wasting disease. The beloved's gaze is like a weapon; once wounded by it, the lover's condition is terminal.

SOURCE: Ibn Hamdis, *Diwan Ibn Hamdis*, 113

Oh, garden of love
scorched now by the fire of your scorn

Oh, for your fragrance
bursting with basil, ever sweet

And the honeyed dew,
distilled from the kohl of your eyes

Take pity! Your little servant falls
wounded by desire

He takes aim, but he cannot strike
the distant target that he desires

5

Who will lift him from his bed
to stand before the rising sun?²⁰

SOURCE: Ibn Hamdis, *Diwan Ibn Hamdis*, 492

20. The word that Ibn Hamdis uses (*ghazala*) may mean rising sun or gazelle. The poets use the word as an epithet for the beloved; and many of the words derived from this root (like *ghazal*, or “love poem”) have amorous connotations. In the final line, thus, the beloved—whose fiery rejection scorched the garden in the opening line of this fragment—appears in a more benevolent light, as the rising sun.

You tortured me with the two elements:
a flame in my heart, water in my eye

You cloaked me in sickness:
I see that you too wear it in your eyes

My body is a phantom that
approaches you, seeking its due

I've become invisible because of sickness:
I am safe from the glance of enemies

And if I am protected from death,
it is because he cannot find me

5

ABU MUSA

(The judge Abu Musa 'Isa ibn 'Abd al-Man'am al-Siqilli)

'Imad al-Din, a medieval Arab anthologist, preserved the following two fragments from the poetry of Abu Musa, about whom we know little. In the first fragment, Abu Musa rails against those who have invaded his homeland. The designation that he uses for them (Banu al-Asfar, literally "blonde tribe") was used to refer initially to the Byzantine Greeks, and later to northern Europeans. In the second fragment, the poet develops an elaborate and tender description of—ironically enough—his blonde beloved. The introductory comments are 'Imad al-Din's.

SOURCE: 'Abbas, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 159–60

Among the marvelous works cited by him is the following *ghazal*, sweeter than the fulfillment of hope:²¹

Oh, blonde tribe, my blood is on your hands
among you is my killer and the one who shed my blood

Is it acceptable to forsake one who has affection for you?
And is it lawful, in the Messiah's faith?

Oh eye! ill, though not from sickness:
if it could see the heart, it would be healed

21. A *ghazal* is a love poem. It is to be supposed that the anthologist is selecting vituperative lines from a longer poem—or that he here displays a particularly mordant sense of humor.

Everything, after I saw you,
every beautiful thing is ugly in my eyes

[. . .] And he wrote:

My tears expose my love: my patience is at an end
with the maiden who gazes with the eyes of a young wild cow

A blonde who loves to dress in white,
and her veil is tinted red

as if she, in her chemise and veil,
were whitening and reddening the one who watches

A ruby, sheathed in silver
and crowned with carnelian

AL-ATRABANISHI

(*Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi al-‘Abbas, the state secretary, the Trapanese*)

A modern scholar called this poem—actually an excerpt from a longer qasida—“practically the symbol of Muslim Sicily,” although it was written during the years of Norman rule and in tribute to the Norman ruler. For a discussion of this poem, see above, pp. 26–27.

SOURCE: ‘Abbas, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 54–55

Among his works is the description of the park of Roger II,²² known as Favara:²³

Oh, Favara of the two seas! in you, desires converge!
In you life is pleasant, your view is majestic

Your waters are divided into nine streams;
how lovely their divided flow!

At the convergence of your two seas, a battlefield of love
and upon your two bays, desire encamps

How glorious is the sea of the two palm trees, and what the sea surrounding it
contains:
it is the greatest of all places

22. The anthologist does not name Roger, but cites his *‘alama—al-mu’tazziyā*, “the powerful” (see above, p. 26).

23. *Fawwara*, in Arabic, means “fresh water spring.”

It is as if your waters, where they flow together, in their clarity
were melted pearls, and the land were dusky skin

5

And as if the branches of the gardens stretched out
to gaze on the billowing waters and smile

The fish swim in the clarity of her water
and the birds of her gardens sing

The oranges of the island when they blossom
are like fire blazing in branches of chrysolite

The lemons are like the yellow complexion of a lover
who, having spent the night in the torment of distance, laments

And the two palm trees like two lovers who choose
as protection from the enemy, a castle well-fortified against them

10

Or as if misgiving clings to them, and they draw themselves up
to frighten suspicion out of the one who suspects them

Oh two palms of the two seas of Palermo, may you always drink
of the sustaining rain! May it not be cut off!

May you take pleasure in the passage of time, may it grant all your desires,
and may history lull you to sleep

By God, protect with your shade the people of love,
for in the safety of your shade love finds protection!

This account of an eyewitness is not to be doubted: rather
distrust the trivial descriptions based on hearsay

15

AL-BUTHAYRI AND IBN BASHRUN

(*‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Amr al-Buthayri and ‘Uthman ibn*

‘Abd al-Rahim ibn ‘Abd al-Razzaq ibn Ja‘far ibn Bashrun)

Little is known about al-Buthayri; his name indicates that he was from the Sicilian village Butera (Arabic *Buthayr*). The anthologist ‘Imad al-Din preserved both a fragment from his poem in praise of Roger II and a response to that poem written by Ibn Bashrun, a poet from al-Mahdiyya (in present day Tunisia) who spent much of his life in Sicily. The prose comments are ‘Imad al-Din’s.

SOURCE: ‘Abbas, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 58–59

His [that is, al-Buthayri's] name was 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn 'Amr, and he knew the Qur'an by heart and rivaled [the best of] his peers. It is said that he had extraordinary skill in the art of letter writing, and in the art of rhymed prose he expressed extraordinary ideas.²⁴ A *qasida* by him is cited in which he praises Roger, the Frankish lord of Sicily, and describes [Roger's] lofty buildings. It is said that he himself [that is, the poet] recited verses from the poem:

Pass round the golden carnelian-red [wine]
and join the morning to the evening [in your revelry]

Drink at the tempo of the lute chords
and the songs of Ma'bad²⁵

No living is serene, save
in the sweet heights of Sicily

In a dynasty that rivals
the empires of the Caesars

And from the same poem:

And in the palaces of the victorious state
joy breaks its journey and settles

5

How admirable its site:
the Compassionate [Lord] has perfected its appearance

And the loggias, more radiant than
any architectural work²⁶

And his [Roger's] gardens of new herbage, where
earthly existence reverts to splendor

And from the mouths of the lions in his fountain
the waters of paradise gush forth

And spring dresses the land
with its beauty in radiant cloaks,

10

24. Rhymed prose is a venerated rhetorical figure in Arabic literature and one used liberally by 'Imad al-Din himself—for example, in the lines translated here.

25. Ma'bad was a poet from Damascus.

26. Clearly, al-Buthayri is celebrating a Norman palace; it is not known, however, which one.

and transforms it, and crowns its countenance
with bright and bejeweled garments

They perfume the eastern breeze
at morning and evening

This is a long poem.

Ibn Bashrun said: “When al-Buthayri showed me this poem, he asked me to make verses in the same rhyme and meter, and I responded:”

Oh, what a garden of victory,²⁷
that overflows with radiant beauty

And its castle, handsome in construction,
with its [imposing] appearance and its lofty galleries,

with its wild animals and its waters
like the finest fountains of paradise

Already its gardens have burst into bloom,
from amongst them emerge radiant robes

The fragrance of its earth is overspread
with an ornamented silk brocade

5

Its breaths are wafted to you
fragrant with the perfume of amber

And its trees, well-ordered
with an abundance of harvest fruits

And its birds chatter to each other
tirelessly in the morning and the evening²⁸

In this land exalted Roger thrives,
king of the Caesars,

among the delights of a lengthy life
and Sicily’s pleasing beauties

10

27. Ibn Bashrun repeats much of the vocabulary used in al-Buthayri’s poem; the first hemistich of Ibn Bashrun’s composition ends with the same word as the first hemistich in al-Buthayri’s verse 5 above: *al-mansuriyya*, “the victorious.” Here, the word seems to be used with some specificity, as if it referred to a particular garden.

28. The first hemistiches of lines 3–8 end with a feminine possessive pronoun, referring to the royal garden. Thus, like al-Attabanishi’s poem, Ibn Bashrun’s panegyric represents the king’s parklands as a symbol of the state and, ultimately, of the power of the ruler of the state.

I limit myself to the two *qasidas* that I have cited because they are in praise of the infidels, as has been demonstrated.

ABU AL-DAW'

(*Abu al-Daw'* *Siraj ibn Ahmad ibn Raja'*, the state secretary)

This ode was written on the occasion of the death of one of Roger II's sons. For a discussion of this poem, see p. 100.

SOURCE: 'Abbas, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 43–44

The radiant moon has been extinguished and the world grown dark
and our support has tumbled from its grandeur and its nobility

Ah, just when he stood tall in his beauty and his majesty,
and when glories and nations felt proud of him

Does the perversity of fate carry him off in deception
suddenly? The fates are perverse!

Thus too [fate] hinders the waxing of the moon:
as soon as it reaches perfection—the decrease

It is right that tears fall for him,
tears that, in the riverbed of the cheek, become pearls and coral

5

Hearts burn, and souls sicken,
and distress grows stronger and sorrows more numerous

And sorrows are acquired and tears let loose
and copious waters joined to the fires of torment

His war-tents and his palaces weep for him
and his swords and his lances lament him

And the whinnies of his horses turn, in their throats,
to nostalgia, though reins and halters restrain them

The grey leaves of the thicket weep only for him; and if
they understood, the branches would lament before the doves²⁹

10

29. There is a play, in this line, on the pale grey leaves of the thicket and the doves. In the first hemistich, the adjective *murq*—meaning ashen or pale grey—appears without a substantive,

Oh, what a terrible loss! Oh, a calamity
that taxes patience and demands comfort

Oh, day of abominable horror
whose terrible sight engendered grey hair in children

It was as if the herald had announced its coming
and set humanity in motion, one and all, just as they were³⁰

And the spacious earth became straitened with humanity—still they gathered,
a thronging crowd of men and women

And hearts were torn, not sleeves; nightingales pronounce the formula,
“Unto God we return”;
and spirits and minds were shaken

15

And they [that is, humanity], dressed in gay clothes, resembled white doves
but now have become crows, dressed in clothes of mourning

ABU HAFS

(Abu Hafs 'Umr ibn Husn al-Nahwi the Sicilian)

The following ode, a panegyric for Roger II, is noteworthy for its sophisticated wordplay. Abu Hafs links Roger with images of light and creates a portrait of him victoriously dispelling the darkness. See the description of Roger's "gleaming" face, compared to the sun (verse 6), and the dense image of the king's sword, likened to a pen that writes with white ink and thus—rather than darkening a white page—brightens the darkness (verse 8). The sophistication of the composition is the more remarkable for the fact that (as 'Imad al-Din informs us) the poet wrote it while in prison, in the hope of earning his release: one imagines him penning the work in a gloomy cell, fearing that he would never again see the daylight. The introductory and interlinear comments are by 'Imad al-Din.

SOURCE: 'Abbas, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 149–50

. . . Among his poems is a *qasida* in praise of Roger, lord of Sicily, which he wrote when he was imprisoned:

signifying the pale, fluttering leaves of the thicket. In the second hemistich, the doves are understood to be grey and fluttering in the branches, like the leaves. The doves will reappear in the closing line of the poem.

³⁰. The implied reference, in this line and the next, is to the day of judgment.

He sought solace, though it were from someone other than his Su'ad,
who might occupy the dark pool of his heart and soul

And he hoped for a visit from her phantom, while she shunned him,
while his desire denied him the sweetness of sleep

By God! Were it not for Roger, who
bestows upon his friends the magnificence of his love,

he [that is, the poet] would not refuse the chalice of nobility on the day
of separation from her
and he would behold the augur of nobility on the day of his birth³¹

And from the same poem, this panegyric:

Eager in giving—with the eagerness of the one who holds a sword,
which he brandishes in his hands on the day of destruction

5

In the darkness his face is gleaming dawn:
you would think that the splendor of the sun were among those who envy him

Where Orion rises, he stakes his tents
and the stars, the sun, the moon are his tent-poles

When matters are uncertain, then his sword
writes, whitening their blackness with its ink

And from the same poem:

Oh king! who stands firm
hardy and rooted, on the rock of his roughness

The spirits of his enemies provoked him, and he scattered them
laughing, as they received the blade-edge from his sheath

10

I limit myself to these selections, though they make one thirst for more,
since they transmit praise for the infidels, may God speed them to the flames
of his hell-fire. But the poet can be forgiven, on the grounds that he was
imprisoned [when he wrote this poem].

31. Here, the poet develops a sophisticated play of words and ideas. He suggests that he would happily have accepted separation from his beloved, were he to leave her in order to join Roger. And he opposes the day of his imprisonment (and his separation from Su'ad) to the day of Roger's birth—which augured his greatness.

INTRODUCTION TO AL-IDRISI'S *GEOGRAPHY*

Al-Idrisi was born in Ceuta, Morocco, probably in 1100, and died in Sicily in about 1165. He had settled in Palermo by 1138. Under the commission of Roger II, he produced a geography entitled *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtirak al-afaq* ("Amusements for those who long to traverse the horizon"; some early manuscripts, including the one translated here, state that this title was Roger's invention). The work was completed during the first half of January 1154, five or six weeks before Roger's death. According to Ibn Bashrūn (also a poet; see the translation of his panegyric for Roger, pp. 140–43), al-Idrisi wrote another geographical work (or expanded the earlier one) at the request of William I, but this work has not survived. In this excerpt from the introduction, al-Idrisi describes the method Roger used to compile, collate, and confirm the geographical information included in the book. Like Frederick II in his introduction to the *De arte venandi cum avibus* (see below, pp. 162–64), al-Idrisi affirms the soundness of the scientific methodology pursued in the present work (and critiques the unsound methodology of his predecessors).

SOURCE: Al-Idrisi, *Opus geographicum*, 5–7

As evidence of Roger's splendid learning and his illustrious and lofty inclinations, once he ruled an ample kingdom, once the aspirations of the people of his realm had been advanced, once the lands of the *Rumi*³² acceded to him and their peoples accepted obedience to him, it pleased him to know the nature of his land and to know it with certainty and with precision. So he acquired knowledge about its boundaries, its roads and sea routes, into how many regions it was divided, and the nature of its seas and bays. He also wished to know about other lands, their division into the seven climate zones upon which the scholars agree and which the translators and authors confirm in their registers, and what parts of them belonged to which of the climate zones. He researched and calculated the matter by studying what was contained in books written in this branch of knowledge, such as *On Marvels* by al-Mas'udi, and the books of Abu Nasr Sa'id al-Jihani, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Abdullah ibn Khurdadhbha, Ahmad ibn 'Umr al-'Udhri, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad al-Hawqali al-Baghdadi, Khanaj ibn Khaqan al-Kaymaki, Musa ibn Qasim al-Qaradi, Ahmad ibn Ya'qub (known as al-Ya'qubi), Ishaq ibn al-Hasan the astronomer, Qudama al-Basri, Ptolemy al-Aqludi [that is, Claudius], and Orosio the Antiochene.

But he did not find the information he sought thoroughly explained and set forth in these books; in fact, he found them to be rather simpleminded. So he summoned to his presence experts in these things, discussed the matter

³². *Rumi*: Christians (whether Byzantine or Latin).

with them, and sought their knowledge on the subject. But he did not find among them any more knowledge than he had found in the books mentioned above. When he saw how things stood, he dispatched an order throughout his lands and summoned those who had knowledge in these matters and had traveled in these lands, and he had them questioned by an intermediary, in groups and one by one. When their accounts agreed with each other and corroborated each other, he recorded what was most reliable and most trustworthy. When they varied among each other, he put their information aside and disregarded it. He worked in this manner for about fifteen years. Not for a single moment during this time did he neglect his research and his search to uncover the truth, until his work became complete as he wished it. Then he asked the aforementioned people for certain, sound, and corroborated information concerning the distance in length and breadth of the lands.

Then he ordered that a drawing tablet be brought, and he began to test their information with a measuring device made of iron, point by point, keeping in mind the books previously mentioned and giving precedence among them to those that seemed most authoritative. He applied himself assiduously to this project until he hit upon the truth. Then he ordered that a great sphere be made for him of pure silver, large in volume and great in mass, which weighed 400 *Rumi* pounds, each pound being worth 112 dirhams. When this had been completed, he ordered that the outline of the seven climate zones be engraved on it with their nations and regions, their coastlines and seashores, their bays, seas, rivers, and the mouths of rivers, the populated regions and the unpopulated, and the well-traveled internal roads of each nation and those between nations with the distance figured and recorded in miles, as well as the best-known anchorages: all this information was transcribed from the drawing tablet and inscribed on the silver sphere, with nothing left out, its likeness set down and its form etched on it with precision.

Next the king commanded that a book be written corresponding to the details included in the sphere, matching its description of the nature of the countries and the lands, their nature and nations and places and the situation of the lands, their seas and mountains, their crops, the sorts of buildings and the other peculiarities found there, the employments of men in each, the industries that were marketed in each, the merchandise that was imported to and exported from each, the marvels that were reported and related about each, and where it was in the seven climate zones, along with reports about the condition of its people: their appearance, their nature, their faith, their clothing and ornaments, their languages. And he ordered that the book be called *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtirak al-afiq* ["Amusements for those who long

to traverse the horizon”]. This was during the first ten days of the Christian month that corresponded to the month of *Shawwal* during the year 548 A.H. [that is, January 1154 C.E.]. And I have obeyed the king’s command and interpreted the inscriptions on the sphere.

THE *TRAVELS* OF IBN JUBAYR

Ibn Jubayr’s *Travels* describe his journey from his native al-Andalus to Mecca and back. He reached Sicily in 1184 on his return voyage to al-Andalus; at this time, William II ruled Sicily, and in the passages translated below Ibn Jubayr describes his own encounter with and impressions of the king. Ibn Jubayr is a florid, sometimes pedestrian, but always effective narrator. In these passages, he consistently uses the word ‘*ajiba* and related words (translated as “marvel” or “wonder,” “marvelous” or “wondrous”) to describe Sicily’s most remarkable characteristics, both natural and ethnographic. Of particular interest is his use of this word when referring to William’s interest in Arab culture. Ibn Jubayr makes it clear that the Arabs of Sicily suffer under the new Christian rulers. At the same time, he finds the dominance of Arab culture in Sicily and at William’s court in particular to be striking and worthy of extensive comment. For a discussion of Ibn Jubayr’s description of Sicily, see above, pp. 1–4.

Ibn Jubayr arrives in Sicily: The following passage is a portion of Ibn Jubayr’s description of the shipwreck that caused the travelers’ unscheduled stop in Sicily. The month of Ramadan has just begun; the travelers have already had a difficult journey, spending two months traversing a distance they had thought to cover in two weeks.

SOURCE: *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 293

On the morning of the first day of the month, we saw before us the mountain of fire: that is, the famous volcano of Sicily. We rejoiced at this, and may God most high increase our recompense for what we have endured and end our days with the most beautiful and brilliant of his works; may each of us feel gratitude for what has been granted us, for his gracious blessing.

At that propitious moment, a breeze blew us in the direction we wished to move. On the evening of Saturday, the second day of the month, the wind intensified and drove the boat with propulsive gusts. There was nothing else for it: when night had fallen, we were driven into the first part of the strait. In this strait, the sea narrows to a distance of six miles, and at its narrowest to a distance of three miles, battering the edge of the mainland and of the island of Sicily. The sea in this strait bursts like the bursting of the dam,³³ like

33. Ibn Jubayr refers to the dam of Ma’rib; see below, p. 151.

the seething of water in a cauldron, so constricted is the passage, and it makes the journey difficult indeed for ships. But our ship persisted in the journey, and the southern wind drove it fiercely along, with the coastline of the mainland on our right and the coastline of Sicily on our left. . . .

King William to the rescue: Despite the captain's efforts to save the ship—one of the sails must be cut down with a knife because the crew are unable to lower it—it founders in the strait within sight of the Sicilian city of Messina. The passengers commend their souls to God and await the morning.

SOURCE: *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 295

Then morning dawned and small boats came to our aid. The sun had risen on the city, and the king of Sicily himself, William, came with a group of his men to observe the situation. We rushed to embark in the boats, but the force of the waves would not allow them to approach the ship. Our descent into the boats was the culmination of our great terror, and our deliverance onto dry land was like the deliverance of Abu Nasr from destiny.³⁴ A portion of the passengers' means of subsistence had been destroyed, but they took comfort in another plunder—their return to safety.

We heard a marvelous story. The king of the *Rumi* observed the poverty of the Muslims looking out from the ship who possessed no means to pay their landing fee, because the owners of the boats had raised the fee they charged for deliverance. He asked to know their story, then ordered that their landing fee be paid with one hundred gold coins from his mint. Thus the Muslims were delivered to safety, and they said: "Praise be to God, Lord of the two worlds."³⁵

Ibn Jubayr introduces us to King William.

SOURCE: *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 297–99

King William is wondrous for the excellence of his conduct, and for the use he makes of the Muslims of his kingdom. He employs eunuchs, all or most of whom conceal their Islamic faith but follow Islamic law. He places much trust in Muslims and relies on them in his affairs and the most important matters of his work. Even the manager of his kitchen is a Muslim. He has a staff of black Muslim servants, led by a chief chosen from among them. His ministers and chamberlains—he has a large staff of them—are people of his

34. A proverbial phrase whose referent is unknown.

35. "The two worlds": that is, heaven and earth. This phrase is the opening of the *fatiha*, the prayer that begins the Qur'an.

court and his entourage, and they flaunt the splendor of his kingdom in the proud clothes they wear and the agile horses they ride. Each and every one of them has his own entourage, his own possessions, and his own followers.

This king possesses imposing palaces and beautiful gardens, particularly in the capital of his kingdom. In Messina, he has a palace as white as a dove, rising above the seashore. He manages a great number of youths and handmaidens. There is not among the Christians any king wealthier or more devoted to comfort and luxury than he; immersing himself in the delights of his kingdom, and the arrangement of its laws, and the establishing of its customs, and the apportioning of the ranks of its men, and honoring monarchic ostentation and the display of the ornaments of monarchy, he is to be compared to the kings of the Muslims, and his kingdom is mighty indeed. He has doctors and astrologers, and he lavishes attention on them and is covetous of their advice, to the extent that whenever he is told that a doctor or an astrologer is passing through his country, he orders that the man be detained and showers him with payment until he forgets about his own homeland—may God protect Muslims from the seductions of such a fate. He is about thirty years old, and may God protect the Muslims from his power and the extension of his power. Among the marvels reported concerning him is that he reads and writes Arabic, and his *'alama*³⁶—according to what one of his personal servants told us—is “Praise be to God; it is righteous to praise him.” And his father’s *'alama* was “Praise be to God in thanks for his graces.”

The handmaidens and concubines in the palace are all Muslims. One of the most marvelous things that this servant—Yahya ibn Fityan, the embroiderer, who ornaments the king’s clothing with golden thread—told us was that the Frankish Christian women who come to the castle become Muslims once they are there; the Muslim handmaidens convert them, but they hide this whole affair from the king. Marvelous stories are told concerning the good works of these women. We also heard that there was an earthquake on the island; its trembling terrified this polytheist.³⁷ As he walked through his palace, he heard his servants, women and men, calling out the name of God and his prophet. Perhaps the sight of him alarmed them, but he said to them: “Let each of you call upon the god you have faith in; let that bring peace to you.”

36. An *'alama* is an honorific royal title used by Muslim rulers.

37. Medieval Muslims regularly used this word to refer to Christians, who worshipped a triune God.

Ibn Jubayr describes Mount Etna.

SOURCE: *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 301

There is a lofty mountain on the island known as the Mountain of Fire. A marvelous thing is reported concerning it, and that is that during certain years fire comes forth from it like the bursting of the dam.³⁸ It burns everything it passes until it reaches the sea, and then it rides atop the surface of the waves until it sinks beneath them. God be praised for the marvels of his creation! There is no God but he.

THE DAUGHTER OF IBN 'ABBAD AND FREDERICK II

This tale of an unnamed woman who resisted Frederick's efforts to drive the Muslims out of Sicily comes from a geographical dictionary (*Kitab al-rāwd al-mi'tar fi khabar al-aqtar*, or "Book of the perfumed gardens concerning news about the regions [of the earth]"). Very little is known about the author, Ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyari. Scholars speculate that a first redaction of this geography was written toward the end of the thirteenth century and has now disappeared; the second redaction, written in 1461 by a descendent of the author of the first, survives in a number of manuscripts. It is known, however, that the author of the second redaction was a Maghrebi jurisconsult. This episode—which was not, to my knowledge, noted by Christian historians—is related in a dramatic and effective style. The author narrates the devastating unfolding of events in a few well-chosen words; the exchanges between Frederick and Ibn 'Abbad's daughter are particularly pithy and effective. The key word in this brief tale is *hila*, which appears a number of times and is translated, depending on the context, as "deceit," "wiles," or "guile." The word can also mean "stratagem, maneuver, expedient," and connotes a strategy used in order to effect a change in a state of affairs, or a shift in the balance of power—an effective theme for this stark story of a defiant heroine battling an emperor with the numbers on his side.

SOURCE: Évariste Lévi-Provençal, "Une héroïne de la résistance musulmane en Sicile au début du XIII^e siècle," 284–86

Entella: A mighty castle and inaccessible fortress on the island of Sicily.

Muhammad ibn 'Abbad, leader of the Muslim rebels in Sicily, fortified himself in this fortress. During the year 616 [1219/20], he made a peace treaty with the emperor who ruled Sicily and other nations, the conditions being that he would submit to the emperor; that he would take with him all his

³⁸ Ibn Jubayr refers again—using the same words—to the bursting of the dam of Ma'rib (cf. his description of the force of the current in the Strait of Messina, above, p. 148).

goods and provisions; that he would be given passage to the coast of Africa; and that they would not kill him. His daughter refused to enter into the pact, and refused to leave the citadel. She said to her father: "I will be your ransom. If all should come out well for you, I will follow you; if not, I will become an annoyance to your enemies and punish them by avenging you to the extent of my power." After he disappeared onto the ships and the ships vanished from sight, the ministers said to him: "The sultan [that is, Frederick II] has kept his promise and has not broken his oath. For look: we are headed toward the coast of Africa, and he has not killed you. But *we* will drown you in the sea; and we will save the faith of the Messiah from you. For you have committed offenses against this island the likes of which will not soon be forgotten." Then they drowned him and returned with all his property to the emperor.

His daughter praised her decision; and her perspicacity in refusing to leave this citadel that embraced the clouds was confirmed. She went out morning and evening on raids of incursion with Muslim knights and fighters, who knew that the emperor had acted faithlessly.

Then, in the year 619 [1222/23], she sent a message to the emperor, saying, "I am a woman, and I have been worn down by the men's combat and their maneuvers. My strength has been exhausted between my allies and my enemies, and my spirit has been weakened; and the leaders of the rebellion who are with me do not obey my wishes. Deliver me, and deliver yourself and the people of your kingdom, from this constant distress: send me three hundred of your warriors—men who will have no fear and who will not betray me. I will open the fortress for them at night, and they will attack it. If they master it, I will be obedient to you. There will be no catastrophe to dread after that. Think about what I have written to you; God dispenses as he chooses."³⁹

The emperor and his men had been delayed for a long time by the siege. And he saw that it was not necessary to delay further the opportunity of seizing this prize. So he chose three hundred of his soldiers, gave them his command, and set the plan in motion during the night. She opened the gate of the citadel for them and divided them among her warriors, using her wiles to finish them off. When the darkness had passed and there was enough light to make out faces, the emperor rode in the direction of the castle in order to view his banners upon the castle walls. But what he saw was nothing other than the heads of his soldiers suspended on the battlements; the Muslims' banners could be seen, and the beating of their drums and the loud cries of

39. Cf. Qur'an 28:68.

their voices were heard. He was at a loss; and the Franks gazed upon an outcome for which they had not accounted and which they would not have anticipated but in a dream.

The emperor wished to end this matter to his satisfaction by using his wiles against her. He sent a message to her, saying, “You have acted deceitfully. And I do not care about those of my religion whom you have killed. It seems to me that there is not a woman in the world better suited to bear my child than you. So come, do it! If you remain in the situation you’re in, and you fall into the hands of the Franks, they will cut you limb from limb. Decide for yourself which outcome you would consider most beneficial.”

She replied, “Your message has reached me, and I have understood both its truth and its falsehood. One of my lookouts, whom I continually send among you, has told me that you said, ‘What a marvel: she cheated me of three hundred men!’ Yet that is not a marvel; for it was revealed, in the book revealed to our prophet Muhammad (God bless him and grant him salvation), concerning women: *Their cunning is great.*⁴⁰ This is but a proof of that. What is truly to be marveled at is you and me. I am barren—without a child in any corner of the world, and without a protector. You rule lands spanning a journey of half a month, and your army crowds the world, and you possess treasures and properties and are rich too in men to advise you. And it has made an impression on you that this affair has brought you to a standstill, you and your important business affairs. I am master of you more than you are master of me, and I have injured you more than you have injured me. Behold: I have prostrated you with the chains of my guile. For your deceit was sufficient to make me lose face, and then my deceit claimed your warriors. One day—I have not lost hope—you will fall into my hands, while I have breath left in my body; and I will battle you, and use my wiles against you, until the provisions in this citadel are exhausted and my people weakened. When I reach that point—you will learn what I will do.”

The emperor lost hope concerning her, and said, “This is bound to take a long time.” So he built a castle and stationed troops there, overlooking her castle. It got to the point where foot soldiers patrolled the base of the castle frequently, and whenever the troops got weary they were replaced; until she reached the end to which she alluded, and she poisoned herself.

40. Cf. Qur'an 12:28.

From the Latin

HENRICUS ARISTIPPUS'S PREFACE TO HIS TRANSLATION OF PLATO'S *PHAEUDO*, CA. 1156

Henricus Aristippus translated two of Plato's dialogues from the Greek to the Latin: the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. The Roboratus to whom Henricus addresses his translation has not been identified (but see Charles Homer Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 168–71). It is to be presumed, however, that *roboratus*, meaning “strong, vigorous,” is a play on the name *Robertus*. Henricus was a central figure in twelfth-century Sicilian scientific circles. In addition to his versions of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, he made a Latin version of Ptolemy's *Optics*—and his translation remains the only extant version of that work. And the translator of Ptolemy's *Almagest* reports that he received the Greek version of that text from Henricus, who had acquired it in Constantinople (see pp. 156–58).

SOURCE: Valentin Rose, “Zu Diogenes Laertes,” 387–88

Two words perpetually preserve human knowledge: teaching and learning; and two give it support when it stumbles: refuting and being refuted. Both of these are as praiseworthy as they are pleasing and useful. But the second of each pair is the more desirable, in that it is easier to be corrected when one is in error than it is to correct. You have embraced these two qualities always with a dual affection, both carefully and gently: you pursue the first of the series gently, and the second with care. Thus it is, my Roboratus—I speak boldly—that to your face I censor your friendship for an exaggerated haste. Indeed, all haste is improvident; but if it is exaggerated, its fault is the greater. Whither do you hurry; to what home do you prepare to return? To the learned man any land is a homeland, they say, however uncultivated the region where he finds himself. In Sicily, you have the libraries of Syracuse and Argolica. Latin philosophy is not lacking; Theoridus of Brindisi, most learned in Greek letters, is on hand to help;⁴¹ your Aristippus is present, of whom you might make use, if not as a sword, at least as a grindstone. You have the *Mechanics* of Hero before your hands⁴²—Hero, who argued with such subtlety concerning the void: how great its power, and the speed of an object moving through it. You have the *Optics* of Euclid, who examines opinion concerning sight so truthfully and so admirably, proving his conjectures using demonstrative reason. You have Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, concerning the principles of the sciences, in which he uses axioms concerning nature

41. Nothing is known of this scholar.

42. Hero of Alexandria, author of a first-century A.D. *Catoptrics*.

and the senses to debate matters that transcend nature and the senses. The philosophy of Anaxagoras, Aristotle, Themistius, Plutarch, and other philosophers of great renown is in your hands; but perhaps you acquired the gist of these works—at least while you have devoted your attention effectively to the pursuit of medicine. But nevertheless I place before you the theorems of theology, mathematics, and meteorology.

Why linger over enumerating the marvels of other great names? You have, among all those scholars in England, too, those whom you might consult, and whom you can list as recompense for what you will lose. But among all the advantages that you might list, will you find a King William? Indeed, you will not find his equal in all the polished globe of the world. His court is an academy of camaraderie; each of his words is a philosophical axiom; his questions are complex, and his solutions leave nothing out; his zeal leaves nothing untried; Sicily, Calabria, Lucania, Campania, Puglia, Libya, and Africa⁴³ celebrate his sovereignty; Dalmatia, Thessalia, Greece, Rhodes, Crete, Cyprus, Cyrene,⁴⁴ and Egypt feel the weight of his victorious right hand; his glorious deeds are made the more illustrious and the more radiant by his lineage from his even greater father, Roger. You are able to attain intimacy with him the more swiftly in that your skill and knowledge merit greater familiarity than those who are your intimates, and worthier too are yours than our own embraces. But if you are not moved by such warnings from your Aristippus and you do not desist from beginning your journey, go, and fare well. Beware that you do not deceive yourself. And as solace on your long journey, take such provisions as I am able to bestow: Plato's *Phaedo*, on the immortality of the soul, translated from Argive into Italianate words, which I began on the battlefield while the estimable king besieged the city of Benevento and completed in Palermo. As many times as you take it up in your hands, which indeed I know that you will do frequently, remember me, whom your departure will deprive of the presence of a great friend. Indeed you will find in this dialogue many subtle points on the contemplation of death, which you will delight in meditating upon, matters which deceived even the philosopher Cleombrotus of Ambracia:⁴⁵ arguments concerning the mutual generation of contraries; the rarity of extremes and the numerousness of medians; an inquiry into causes; the immortality of souls; the location of the

43. These are all—with the exception of Sicily, Libya, and Africa—territories in southern Italy.

44. Cyrene is a province in present-day Libya.

45. Early in Plato's dialogue, an interlocutor asks Phaedo: "And was Aristippus there, and Cleombrotus?" By naming Cleombrotus, Henricus may intend to refer to one of this offstage *dramatis personae* of Plato's dialogue, as well as to make a sly allusion to his ancient namesake.

earth; the true earth, the delights of paradise, and the punishments of hell; the death of Socrates; and other passages of the loftiest philosophy worthy as much of admiration as of study.

PREFACE TO A TRANSLATION OF PTOLEMY'S *ALMAGEST*
BY AN UNKNOWN TRANSLATOR, CA. 1160

This introduction to a translation of an astronomical work by Ptolemy, written in florid Latin, is addressed to a tutor of the translator; neither the translator nor the tutor has been identified. The introduction illustrates the interest, typical of the era and the place, in direct observation and objective scientific method: the translator must travel to the slopes of Etna, where Henricus Aristippus, the king's emissary, is observing volcanic phenomena, in order to retrieve the manuscript of Ptolemy's work to be translated. The dangers he braves, however, do not earn the translator the right to possess the manuscript; he tells us that he must undertake more study in order to prove his capacity to handle the text. The translator mentions two of the most familiar names in twelfth-century Sicilian science: Henricus and Eugenius, himself a translator as well as a poet, who provided the translator with technical advice.

SOURCE: Charles Homer Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 191–92

It is said that the ancients had the custom of painting one of the Graces with her face turned away, stretching out her hand to the other two, who were gazing at her. Mindful of this mystery, I have long held that a kindness once offered and once useful ought to be returned twice. Thus, remembering your good gift—when you generously imbued a parched spirit with the teaching of that knowledge which Aristotle called the most exact of the arts, like a drink of running water⁴⁶—for some time I have anxiously sought a worthy repayment for your benevolence. My mind (the pure and flowing fountain of knowledge) and breast (the dwelling place of the sciences) were not altogether lacking in those things that I—though I was a disciple only lately come to philosophy—had sought to acquire through the long exercise of my meager talent. I understood quite clearly that one who held contempt for such things could promise me no help. Therefore my spirit was tormented daily more and more, enduring a vow the more irksome in that circumstance

46. Haskins speculates that the reference in this line is to Aristotle's *De caelo*. The translator uses a transliteration of a Greek word (*acriestatas*, “most precise” or “exact”) that is also used in the Aristotelian work (*De caelo* 3, 7; Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 162).

absolutely denied me the means of fulfilling that vow. But celestial pity at last heard the clamor of long-lasting desire, bestowing a worthy (as I judge it) instrument of repayment in full, which surpasses your gift—if you would allow me to say so—to the extent that its end is more praiseworthy. For what is obvious to every wise man will not elude your acumen: that knowledge of numbers and of measures builds a bridge that may help us reach the stars. Of the part of this knowledge that deals with the movement of the stars, Claudius Ptolemy, reviser of the ancients and model for the moderns, most expert in the science of the stars, has written thirteen books. These books are called by the Greeks “Megisti sintaxis” [“The great system”], and the Arabs call them by a name that is a corruption of the Greek, “Almagest.” I—laboring at the time as doctor in Salerno—heard that a certain messenger of the king of Sicily⁴⁷ by the name of Aristippus, whom that king himself with imperial largesse had sent to Constantinople, had passed through Palermo. So, for some time filled with the hope of seeing my desire fulfilled, I did not fear the barks of Scylla, passed through Charybdis, and skirted the flowing flames of Etna, seeking him who I hoped could satisfy my desire.⁴⁸ When at last I found him, near the spring of Pergusa, scrutinizing the marvels of Etna not without some danger, certain hidden matters prohibited him from handing the aforementioned work over to me, as well as the fact that my mind was untrained in the science of the stars. I had already studied Greek letters. And so I looked into Euclid’s *Data*, *Optica*, and *Catoptrica*, and the *De motu* of Proclus.⁴⁹ Thereafter, I undertook work on the aforementioned book by Ptolemy and, divine Grace supplying me with a gracious expositor in Eugenius—a man most learned in the Greek as well as the Arabic language and also not ignorant in Latin—I translated it into Latin (against the will of an ill-tempered man).⁵⁰ My mind, overcome by the magnitude of the task, would often have abandoned the labor I had undertaken had not my powerful love for you and my awareness of your gift given me a way of overcoming this difficulty and reminded me constantly of my debt to you. Moved neither by

47. If (as seems likely) Haskins’s dating of this translation (ca. 1160) is correct, the king would be William I.

48. Scylla and Charybdis, the menacing maidens who symbolize the Strait of Messina, and the flames of Etna suggest the dangers that the translator braved in order to acquire the text, which—according to the conceit of this introduction—would allow him to pay his debt. The spring of Pergusa has not been identified (see Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 159).

49. The translator names important scientific studies on optics and the physics of motion by Euclid (ca. 300 B.C.E.) and Proclus (410–85 C.E.).

50. The identity of the “ill-tempered man” and the nature of the “hidden matters” that initially blocked the translator’s work remain mysterious. Concerning Eugenius, the trilingual translator, see above, pp. 30–31.

the hope of profit nor by glory I was able to continue this labor, for it is well known that the artisan does not retain hope when the work is a mockery and a disgrace; nor can one admire the artisan if he does not admire the art. But you too have heard, these days, certain audacious judges of a cause that they do not understand who proclaim—lest they seem less knowledgeable—that whatever they do not know is either useless or profane. As the Arabs say, “No one is more an enemy of an art than one who is ignorant of it.”

“HUGO FALCANDUS” ON THE DEATH OF WILLIAM AND
THE ARRIVAL OF THE GERMANS

The author of this letter is not known, although historians generally assume that it was written by the author of a history of Sicily known to modern readers as “Hugo Falcandus.” The Peter to whom the letter is addressed, however, has been identified: he was canon and treasurer of Palermo at the time of William’s death. The reader should bear in mind that, at the time this letter was written, presumably, Constance had not (yet) crossed the Strait of Messina, and the German armies had not (yet) besieged either the mainland or the insular parts of the kingdom. The letter provides evidence—if such were needed—that the temptation to exaggerate emotional detail in political exhortations transcends temporal and geographical boundaries.

SOURCE: Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie et la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanum Ecclesie Thesaurarium*, 169–72 and 173–74

My dearest Peter,

I had planned, once the bitterness of winter had been mitigated by the blessing of a more clement breeze, to write something cheerful and pleasant that I might address to you as the first fruits of the reborn spring. But upon hearing of the death of the king of Sicily, reflecting within myself and understanding how great the calamity that this change of affairs will bring, how the storm of a hostile invasion might shatter the most peaceful state of the kingdom or a tempest of sedition subvert it, thrown into confusion, I abandoned those earlier plans. I have turned my lute to mourning. I prefer to undertake mournful measures and lugubrious lamentations, although the bright serenity of a sparkling sky and the delightful appearance of the gardens and the groves bring an inappropriate joy to my spirit and attempt to draw me elsewhere and to interfere with my plan to weep and lament. For what place is there for lamentation or complaint, who would not be offended by unseasonable tears, now that the year—wiped clean of the grey

hairs of its frosty old age—is clad once again in the flowery robes of youth, now that temperate spring succeeds the chills of winter and invites the idle throats of the birds to return to the sweetness of songs they had interrupted? But because it is difficult to persuade a child not to mourn the death of a nurse, I cannot—I confess—contain my tears. I cannot pass over the destruction of Sicily—who, pressing me to her dear breast, has nourished me tenderly, fostered me, and carried me—in silence, nor remember it with dry eyes. I seem to see before me now seething columns of barbarians bursting upon her shores, carried forward by the force of their attack. I seem to see them agitating with anxiety the opulent cities and the places flourishing for so long in peace, laying waste to them with massacres, stripping them with pillage, disfiguring them with lust. The vision of the calamity to come forces itself on me and extorts tears from one unwilling to weep. Here the citizens run and are cut down by swords for their opposition or forced to surrender to the misery of slavery; there virgins are raped while their families watch; and there ladies, having been stripped of the precious jewelry that had adorned their heads, their necks, and their breasts, having been made sport of, fix their eyes on the ground and inconsolably lament the violation of the honorable pact of marriage by the lust of a foul race. For the madness of the Germans has not known the rule of the order of reason, nor how to be bent by pity, nor how to be awed by religion—a madness that an innate rage stirs, and rapacity stimulates, and lust spurs on.

It is a horrid and sad crime that this should happen in Apulia and the neighboring provinces, and it is to be lamented bitterly that anyone should think it tolerable that the savagery of the barbarians might lay waste to the lands across the strait. But if the force of a savage storm should burst over that blessed isle, preferred over all realms for its renowned gifts and for its ample merits, if the uncivilized clamor of arms should disturb its delightful leisure and its tranquility—more pleasing than any other enjoyment—who would be able to master his spirit, that it not lament beyond measure? Who would not dissolve in tears when he begins to see the devastation of cities; the death of the citizens; the revered grey hair of the elderly besmirched with dust; mothers dressed in sacks rather than silks; boys and girls terrified by the din of a barbarous tongue; and all the inhabitants reduced from a great abundance of all things to exigency—from joy to mourning, from glory to ignominy, from the greatest heights of happiness to the wasteland of deepest misery? Would that Constance might not be so constant in pursuing her entrance into Sicilian territory with the German king, nor that she be given the opportunity to cross the fields of Messina or the boundaries of Etna! For

these places admirably befit such a race, where Teutonic atrocity might clash with piratical cruelty, and among the shattered stones and the flames of Etna a hard and rocky people might be consumed by the flames of savage rage. For it would be evil and monstrous were the coming of the barbarians to defile the interior of the Trinacria—especially that part which the light of its noblest city illuminates, which has earned the unique privilege of its preeminence over all the kingdom—or were it to be defiled by an invasion of barbarians, offended by the fear of incursions, exposed to the depredations of predators, or thrown into confusion by any imposition of the laws of barbarous outsiders.

I wish you to explain to me: Where do you think this crisis will lead the state? What plan do you believe the Sicilians will pursue? Will they believe that they must name a king and fight against the barbarians with united forces? Or rather will diffidence and a hatred of unaccustomed labor make them slaves of circumstance: Will they prefer to accept the yoke of a prodigiously difficult slavery, rather than defend their reputation and their dignity and the liberty of their land? In the silence of a doubtful mind I turn over these matters; various arguments pull me first this way, then that; I disagree with myself; nor is it apparent which of the possibilities I ought to choose. Certainly, if they were to choose a king of certain virtue, and if the Saracens were not to disagree with the Christians, then the king might be able to improve matters, though they seem desperate and nearly hopeless, and might—if he acts wisely—resist the enemies' advances. . . . Because it is difficult, among such tempestuous events, with no fear of the king, for Christians *not* to attack Saracens, if the Saracens, worn down by the many injuries inflicted upon them, should begin to dissent and perhaps occupy the coastal castles or the fortified cities in the mountains, so that it would be necessary to fight the Germans on the one hand, with the greatest force, and on the other to meet frequent attacks from the Saracens: What do you think the Sicilians will do, pressed into these narrow straits, and stuck as it were between the hammer and the anvil, in a state of crisis? By all means, they will do what they can in order to hand themselves over—wretched as their situation is—to the barbarians and grant the barbarians power over them. If only the nobles and commoners, both Christian and Saracen, would reach a consensus, so that they might harmoniously choose a king for themselves, and with all their strength, with all their vigor, and all their will they might strive to drive out the invading barbarians! Alas, island of wretched condition and accursed fate. . . .

PETER OF EBOLI, LAMENT ON THE DEATH OF WILLIAM II

This passage is typical of laments for King William II in its assertion that all Sicilians (young and old, rich and poor, men and women) mourned his passing and in its celebration of the peace of his reign. Its opening line has become very familiar in recent years; historians cite it as a shorthand evocation of the cultural richness of twelfth-century Sicily (see the discussion of the phrase and its literary sources, pp. 115–16). The bishop who speaks William’s elegy is Walter Offamil, a man who wielded a fair amount of power in the governments of both Williams. At the end of his eulogy, Walter calls on Constance to come to Palermo. Peter of Eboli was a partisan of the Germans. By praising Constance here (as elsewhere in this work), he intends to emphasize the right of her husband—German king Henry VI—to the Sicilian throne.

SOURCE: Petrus Ansolini de Ebulo, *De rebus siculis carmen*, 15–16

Now the fortunate city, endowed with a trilingual people,
is shattered in its heart, wavering in its breast, fallen in its mind:
they cry out with mouth, with hands, with tears; youths join boys
in clamor, the aged join the young;
the rich and the poor, the slaves and the free,

the pious and the impious, all
mourn the King with equal gravity;
the chaste weep with the widows, the brides with the virgins.
What might delay the tears? Only the voice of lament!
The one who lies in the crib, the one of robust strength,
the one who carries a cane as a third leg,
in every place, in every street, in the lofty palaces, all lament.

The ninth day dries the tears.

Then the bishop spoke these words to all—
he was unable to speak more, for his tears:
“Thus far, wandering, we have yet made straight the path;
thus far, our heart

was able to drive the dark wolves from the stables.
Thus far, with no shepherd leading them, the sheep have returned
to the sheepfold in the evening, heavy with milk.
Thus far the wandering cow has feared no lion’s tooth,
the bird has feared no eagle’s beak.

Thus far the traveler has gone singing through the shadows;
thus far there has been no place for treachery.

Thus far, any man could behold himself in that mirror⁵¹
which death has shattered and the tombs of the night now hold.

51. The *mirror*, of course, was William II, “speculum” (image, or ideal) of virtues.

Thus far the candelabra of the wretched kingdom have glowed; 25
 its flame flickers and dims under the earth.
 Send out the word, that the sister of Phoebus and wife of Jove might hasten
 to unite the two with the strength of her rule!"⁵²

FREDERICK II, *HUNTING WITH BIRDS*

Frederick's research for his treatise on falconry—as he tells us in this introduction—occupied him for some years. He worked on the book during the later years of his life. We know that he had Theodore, his translator, produce a Latin version of an important Arabic treatise on falconry, known to medieval Christians as *Moamyn*, in 1241. That same year, Frederick himself worked on corrections to Theodore's translation at the siege of Faenza (and his natural son, Enzo, commissioned a French translation of the Latin version from his Bolognese prison cell in 1249). But the bulk of the material in Frederick's work is taken from his own observations. It is this focus on observation and experimentation that makes the work both typically Sicilian, and proto-modern in its scientific sensibility.

Frederick's own copy of the work was captured, along with other treasures, following a military rout at Parma in 1248. Frederick dedicated the work to his son Manfredi (he is the M. E. of the opening line), and Manfredi himself added considerably to Frederick's work—seeking out his father's notes after the fair copy disappeared; making textual additions based on these and on his own observations; and adding new illustrations.⁵³

SOURCE: Frederick II, *De arte venandi cum avibus*, 2–6

Your urgent request, most illustrious M. E., led us to pursue this work, both in order that we might correct the many errors that have arisen concerning this matter—many artless men abuse a matter that does possess its own art, imitating the mendacious and insufficiently researched books of certain men concerning it—and in order, with this book, to leave behind an artful exposition of the matter.

Although we had proposed long ago to compose this work, we put off the composition of it in writing for almost thirty years, since we still did not

52. The "sister of Phoebus and wife of Jove" is Constance, daughter of Roger II (hence aunt of William II) and wife of Henry VI. Peter, through Walter Offamil's mouth, calls on Constance to unite the two families—the Sicilian rulers and the Hohenstaufen.

53. On the *De arte venandi cum avibus*, see the handsome recent Latin edition, with an Italian translation (Frederick II, *De arte venandi cum avibus* [Rome, 2001]); Charles Homer Haskins's essay, "The *De arte venandi cum avibus* of Frederick II," in *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 299–326; and a work in press while this translation was in preparation: Daniela Boccassini, *Il volo della mente*.

think ourselves up to the task, nor had we read any other work that treated the matter in a sufficient and complete manner; although some portions of works were known, they were inadequately distributed and known by few. Thus over a long period of time we investigated, with care and diligent attention, those things that pertained to this art, dedicating ourselves to the theory and practice of it, in order that we might at last be able to collect in a book those things that we had learned through our own experiences or those of others. We summoned from a great distance—at great expense to ourselves—those who were experienced in the practice of this art, and had with us eleven of those we had summoned, taking advantage of whatever they knew best and commanding their words and deeds to memory. And, although hampered often with almost unspeakably arduous business concerning the governing of kingdom and empire, nevertheless we have not stinted in our efforts to complete the present project. In writing, we have followed in the footsteps of Aristotle, where it seemed appropriate. But in many matters, as we have learned from experience, especially in the nature of certain birds, he seemed to diverge from the truth of things. For this reason we did not follow the prince of the philosophers in all things, for rarely or never did he hunt with birds, whereas we have always esteemed and pursued the practice. Concerning many things that he tells about in his *Book of the Animals*, he reports common knowledge. But that which was common knowledge he had perhaps not seen himself, nor did those repeating the common knowledge see it, and certain knowledge does not come from hearsay.

The fact that many men have written many books but very few about this art is a sign that the art is extremely complex and still vaguely formulated. And we affirm that certain noble men less busy than us, if they devote their energies intently to this art, with the help of this book will be able to compose something better, since new difficulties continually emerge concerning its practice. And so we ask any nobleman who takes up this book with only his nobility to guide him to have it read and expounded by a man experienced in the sciences, indulging its occasional awkward passages: for since this art ought to have its own proper vocabulary, just like other arts, and we have not found in the Latin language words fitting all occasions, we have used those that seemed closest in order that our meaning might be understood.

The subject of this book

The subject of this book is the art of hunting with birds. Certain parts of the book are based on mental examination or on knowledge—these are termed theoretical—while others, which are called practical, are based on

actions. Furthermore, a certain part of both theory and practice come from general mental examination, and the rest from a specialized examination of the same matters.

The intention

Our intention is to demonstrate in this book concerning hunting with birds those things that are, as they are, and to record with the certainty of art matters concerning which no one has yet possessed scientific or applied knowledge [*scientiam . . . neque artem*]. . . .

The author

The author is a seeker and a lover of knowledge: the Holy and August Emperor Frederick II, king of Jerusalem and Sicily.

Its usefulness

Its usefulness is great. For noblemen and powerful men, burdened by the worries of governance, will find diverting distraction from their customary cares by pursuing this art. And the poor and less noble, serving the nobility in their pursuit of this art, will obtain from it things necessary for their living. Through this art, both will possess clear knowledge of the functioning of nature in birds.

This art is supplementary to natural philosophy, as it explices the natures of birds, although their natures—as is documented in this book—seem to differ in certain ways.

FREDERICK II AND LUCERA

This series of letters illustrates some of the difficulties that arose in relation to Lucera, Frederick's Muslim colony in Puglia. In the first letter, Pope Gregory IX repeats to Frederick a scandalous rumor that has reached him—that the Saracens of Puglia have dismantled a church, in order to reuse its stones and beams in Lucera. In the second, Frederick uses Clintonian rhetoric to defend his actions in creating the Muslim colony. Frederick's original letter ordering the relocation of Sicilian Muslims to Lucera, if in fact there was one, has been lost. The third letter translated below reaffirms that order, evidently in response to the Muslims' attempts to leave Lucera and return to their homes.

SOURCE: Gregory to Frederick, 3 December 1232, J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, eds., *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 405–6

We have heard, to our wonder and dismay, that the sons of perdition—

namely, the Saracens established in Puglia—with your consent (which does not seem believable) have transformed the dwelling of angels into a place for beasts of burden: that they have utterly demolished the church of Saint Peter in Bagno Foietano (legally belonging to the monastery of Saint Lawrence of Aversa), carrying away its stones and beams in order to build their houses in Lucera. Because so iniquitous a presumption is known to have been attempted (with insult to the Creator and with injury to the Apostolic See, like a blemish on its name), we ask your Serenity—we warn and urge you firmly—to consider prudently whether any of the churches, especially those within the kingdom that ought to enjoy your special attention in that you have been made by God the defender of those (and of others), whether any of these churches ought to be destroyed by the sacrilegious hands of infidels, in which rather the strength of the Almighty should be praised by the faithful. May you command—for the sake of divine reverence, and for the advancement of your own highness—that the aforementioned church be repaired and that the goods taken away from it, which it had when it was undisturbed, be restored. Furthermore, that excess of liberty with which you are said to indulge those same Saracens is said to be pernicious to the Christians of the neighboring region and brings fear to those who hear about it; so may it please your Sublimity to destroy their presumption in such a way that they might not dare to disturb the hearts of the faithful even in a small way, especially since a distinct injury would seem to be inflicted upon our Redeemer if the sons of Belial, who ought to be suppressed with the shackles of permanent servitude, were to attack the sons of light in our own territory or to judge themselves (in a manner worthy of condemnation) to be our equals in liberty.

SOURCE: Frederick to Gregory, 16 April 1236, in J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, eds., *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 831

Moreover, that old tale ought to have been silenced concerning the destruction of churches, about which I know absolutely nothing, as God is my witness, as well as the tale that I have showed a lack of devotion to you and to the Church because of the settling of Saracens in Puglia. But because mention of these Saracens came from the father from whom we believed the justice of our cause was not hidden, not only are we compelled to wonder, but also to feel pain: we suffer the barbs of unjust refutation where we thought that we would earn the prize of the glory due to us. For we removed—not without much labor of our body, as well as danger to those faithful to us,

and expense—the settlement of Saracens living in the mountains of Sicily, where that island might contain more Christians than today. The injustice to them ceased, and we gathered them in the midst of a plain of Christians. And this, we found, was useful. Because while they are instructed daily by the example of Christians, while their assiduous servitude makes them desire liberty, some of them might be able to escape from their hands of their own people and, washed in the font of baptism into the Christian rite, return to the unity of the Catholic faith. And so their leaders (who are called Alchadi)—while they thought that we who live in Puglia might change our thinking, because of the expectation of damage they said that we suffered on this account—complained that already a third of their community have been led away from their own ritual to our faith; and without a doubt we believe that if the future conforms to the past, after the space of not many days the same shall come to pass for the rest of them.

SOURCE: 25 December 1239, in J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, eds., *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 5, pt. 1, p. 626

Frederick, to all official judges, masters and clerks of the treasuries, municipal officials, and all other officials who are faithful to him on this side of the Strait of Messina: Because it is our pleasure that all the Saracens whom we have ordered to come from the various parts of Sicily be returned to Lucera, we order those faithful to us to follow the order of R. de Montefuscuso, the faithful minister of our empire, that all Saracens in general who are in the lands under your jurisdiction and have been compelled to go to Lucera must stay there. We will not suffer any Saracen now in the lands under your jurisdiction to remain there; rather let them go to Lucera, as our Excellency has commanded, as you have our grace dear.

INNOCENT IV EXCOMMUNICATES FREDERICK

In this letter—but one of the papal letters of excommunication against Frederick—Pope Innocent IV rehearses a series of common complaints in anti-Frederick rhetoric: his collusion with Saracens, both within Sicily and abroad.

SOURCE: Pope Innocent, letter of excommunication against Frederick, 17 July 1245, in J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, eds., *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 6, pt. 1, p.325

Moreover, having linked himself in detestable intimacy with the Saracens, he sent messengers and gifts to them frequently and received the same from

them, with every honor and with delight. He embraced their rituals; remarkably, he kept them close to him, in daily servitude to him. Moreover, in the Saracens' manner, he was not ashamed to assign eunuchs as guardians to his consorts, descendants of the royal stock; in particular, eunuchs whom—it is said in earnest—he had had castrated. And what is even more execrable, while he was across the sea, he made a certain pact—or better, a collusion—with the Sultan, and permitted the name of Muhammad to be proclaimed day and night publicly in the temple of God. And recently he received the messengers of the Sultan of Babylon in the Kingdom of Sicily with praise for the excellence of that Sultan, and bestowed upon them honors and pomp—after that same Sultan had imposed, by his own hand and by others', most grievous hardships and inestimable injuries upon the Christians who lived in his land.

THE DESTRUCTION OF LUCERA

This letter from Charles II, Angevin king of Sicily, was written on 24 August 1300, the day on which the Saracen resistance was defeated and the walls of the city breached—although Charles could not have known this, since he wrote the letter from Naples.⁵⁴

SOURCE: Pietro Egidi, *Codice diplomatico dei saraceni di Lucera*, 127–28

Charles II, to Giovanni Pipino de Barolo, soldier, master, and member of our great Court, beloved counselor, our intimate and faithful, etc.

If one considers our predecessors' devotion to God, if one remembers how fervent they were in the Catholic orthodoxy of their faith, there will not be any uncertainty that we, descended from such a religious and faithful stock as that of our ancestors, before all other desires should anxiously wish to advance the Catholic faith. We have known for a good long time what a disgrace it is—indeed, what an offense to that aforementioned faith—that Saracens flourish in our Kingdom, inhabitants to this day of Lucera. And we have always planned in our heart to depopulate that city and move the Saracens out of it, so that it might be populated with Christians. Now we possess the ability to carry out the plan that we have always held in our breast and have nourished in our mind, and are on the verge of achieving it. And so we appoint you—whose zeal and circumspection and perspicacity has indeed

54. On the destruction of Lucera, see Pietro Egidi, *La colonia saracena di Lucera e la sua distruzione*; this episode is discussed on p. 132 of that volume.

through long and intimate knowledge been thoroughly demonstrated—to go there, in order to pursue and carry through our plan in this matter.

Since you have thought as prudently and as courageously as possible about what must be done—whether it should be attempted by force, whether even an unheard-of force would be required to achieve it—and you have carried these thoughts into action, our firmest hope shall be that whatever remains to be done in order to complete our proposed plan of action shall have an equally good execution through your agency, and we have determined that it shall be carried out by you, acting prudently in all matters. Therefore, to the honor of that King of kings, for whom we live and reign, to whom we offer all our actions, to whom we attribute all the good that we do, and also to the reverence for his pious Mother, guardian of human affairs—who, we do not doubt, will grant you her help in these matters which are to be begun and undertaken by you on the feast of her miraculous Assumption—let that city's name be changed, to honor that most glorious virgin, to Civitas Sancte Marie. And we commit our resources to your discretion, provision, arrangement, and command, in order to settle Christians in that land, dividing up its houses and estates and conceding them to the Christians, conferring immunities and liberties as you understand best, in our name and on our behalf. But we especially impose one task on you: that in that place known in Arabic as the Mosque, in which the Saracens are accustomed to gather and pray, you see to the construction of a cathedral church, devoted to our Lady, protector of mankind. Furthermore, see to it that the houses around that place—again, as you see fit to dispose—be preserved for the future use of priests and clerics. So that those things which you arrange, concede, and execute might be granted clear support, so that they might be defended with vigor and carried out with the appropriate firmness, we command that this letter be used as such a defense of your actions and that it be strengthened with the seal of our Majesty.

From the Old French

INTRODUCTION TO THE *BOOK OF SYDRAC*

The text of *Sydrac*—a compendious vernacular encyclopedia that had a wide circulation, not only in this French redaction, but in other Romance and Germanic versions as well—consists of a series of questions addressed by an ancient king to a sage whom God had filled with philosophical knowledge—"Has God always existed, and will he always be?"; "Can God be seen?"; "Is God everywhere?"—

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and the scholar's responses. This introduction explains the genesis of the text, gives the history of translations of it made over the course of some millennia of history, and tells how the text arrived in thirteenth-century Toledo, where the first vernacular translations were made. On this text, see above, pp. 60–61.

SOURCE: Sylvie-Marie Steiner, *Le livre de Sidrach*, 25–26

Through the mercy of God the line of the patriarchs was established, from the time of Adam until the time of Moses. They taught the people to live according to their custom, and all those who maintained their custom were saved. But those who trespassed against the commandment of God and of his ministers at that time, on the day of Resurrection, would dwell in hell forever and would never be in the company of the ministers of God, because they did not keep his commandment. The judgment of our Lord concerning the flood was made for no other reason than the abundance of sin throughout the whole world. After the flood, Noah, his wife, their sons, and their sons' wives lived on the earth and began to do and to keep the precepts of God according to their customs. God blessed them and gave them the blessing of increasing and multiplying. One of Noah's children was named Jaifen.⁵⁵ From one generation to the next they kept the law of God, which their father Noah upheld. God through his mercy wanted to show the great love that he had for the generation of Jaifen, the son of Noah, and he caused a man to be born of that same generation, by the name of Sydrac, whom he filled with all the sciences of knowledge of all things that had been from the beginning of the world until his own time, that is 847 years following the death of Noah, and from his own time until the end of the world. God deigned to reveal to Sydrac, through his grace, the form of his Holy Trinity, so that he could proclaim it to those who would come after him. It is said that he proclaimed the form of the Holy Trinity by the commandment of God to an infidel king by the name of Boctus in order to convert him (as it is written at the beginning of this book).⁵⁶ By the grace of God he knew about the nine orders of angels in heaven, and what purpose each serves; he knew astronomy, and the heavens, and the planets, and the astrological signs,

55. Here, there is an apparent lacuna in the text, which my translation silently amends. "Jaifen" presumably refers to Japheth, the youngest of Noah's three sons; his lineage is not much discussed in Old Testament genealogical passages, although he was the father of Gog, who figures in the New Testament book of Revelations.

56. Boctus may be a reference to a number of kings named Battus, of the dynasty of the Battids, who ruled Cyrene, an ancient Greek colony in Libya. For some time during late antiquity Cyrene was one of the intellectual centers of the Mediterranean.

and the stars, and the paths [they followed], and the hours and the moments [of their rising and setting]; he knew all things, both spiritual and corporal—all the knowledge of the world.

It came to pass that the forenamed king sought out this Sydrac before he was converted concerning certain things that he needed from Sydrac, which you will hear about at the beginning of this book. Since he relates the story twice, we will tell it briefly here.⁵⁷

The king Boctus asked the philosopher many questions, which he wished to know the answers to, and had not found anyone who knew how to answer them. Sydrac responded accurately and correctly concerning what he had been asked, which pleased the king very much. The king had a book made of those same questions and named it “The Book of Sydrac Concerning All Knowledge,” and this is that book.

The book passed from one person to another after the death of King Boctus, into the possession of a great man of Chaldea. Some time later an associate of the devil wanted to burn it, but God did not want it to be lost. After a long time had passed it came into the possession of a king named Madyan,⁵⁸ and after him it came into the possession of a leper named Naama, chief of the knights of the king of Syria. When he heard about it, he valued it very highly, and he used it to cure lepers of their leprosy at the river Jordan.⁵⁹ Then for a time the book was lost.

After the coming of our lord Jesus Christ, because he did not wish that it should be lost, the book came into the possession of a good Greek man who was archbishop of Saba, which in ancient times was called Samaria. This good man was named Ayoc Nacileo, and he had a clerk named Dmitri. He was Christian; and he was sent to Spain to preach the faith of Jesus Christ. He went to Spain, and took this book; and he was martyred and killed in Spain. The book stayed there for a long time.

57. The text, following the introduction translated here, gives a fuller account of the encounter and friendship between Sydrac and King Boctus (Steiner, *Le livre de Sydrac*, 57–63).

58. The name Madyan is possibly derived from the Midianites of the Old Testament.

59. The healing and conversion of Naaman, the leper and Syrian general, is the last of the wonders performed by Elisha (2 Kings 5:1–27). In the Old Testament, however, the leper is cured by *faith* and a dip in the Jordan, rather than by the *Book of Sydrac* and the River Jordan. The Old Testament tale includes a passage of some interest from the present perspective. After his conversion to monotheism as a result of his healing, Naaman testifies: “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15)—an attestation quite close to the first half of the Islamic *shahada*, or profession of faith, “There is no god but God.”

After the clergy arrived in Toledo, they found this book, and they translated it from Greek into Latin. The king of Spain at the time heard about the book and sent for it, and he valued it very highly for the beautiful questions he found in it. Emir Elmomenin,⁶⁰ who at the time was lord of Tunis, heard about the book through his messengers. He sent to the king of Spain, to request the book. The king of Spain had it translated from Latin into Arabic and sent it to the emir Elmomenin, who valued it very highly.

After a long time had passed, at the time of the emperor Frederick, the lord of Tunis made great use of it; for he was reputed to be a very wise man, because of the great questions he posed to people, and for the beautiful responses he made to whatever questions one asked of him. For this reason, Emperor Frederick's messengers wondered where his great knowledge came from. And he told them that in his treasury he had a book that the king of Spain had sent to his ancestors, who were king before him. The messengers reported this to the emperor and the emperor desired the book greatly. He sent a messenger to the lord of Tunis, asking him to send the book. The lord of Tunis replied that he should send a clerk who knew Arabic and Latin. The emperor sent a Friar Minor from Palermo named brother Roger. He translated it into Latin, and took it to the emperor. The emperor was very pleased with it, and valued it very highly.

In the court of the emperor there was a man from Antioch whose name was Theodore, a philosopher whom the emperor loved very much.⁶¹ When he heard about this book, he took great pains and made a great effort to get it, and he assured the chamberlain that he would make a copy of it and use it privately without anyone knowing about it. After a time Theodore the philosopher sent it to the patriarch Obert of Antioch. The patriarch used it for his whole life. He had a clerk named Jean Pierre from Lyon. He copied it and went away to school in Toledo, and there he translated several good books by other names, none of which were available before.

Although Jean Pierre's role in the production of the text is not clarified, the reader is left to assume that he had a hand in translating the text of "Sydrac" that he brought to Toledo. The introduction goes on to say that the translation was made in Toledo by a group of masters and clerks in 1243.

60. The name is a generic term that means simply "Commander of the Faithful." It is not clear that a specific ruler is intended.

61. On the translator Theodore, see above, pp. 59–60.

From the Sicilian

GIACOMO DA LENTINI

“Maravigliosamente”

One of the best known and most engaging of Giacomo's works, this poem explores two themes that are recurrent motifs in Giacomo's poetics in general. He evokes the visual image of the beloved that the poet carries within his heart as a sign of the veracity of his love, comparing it to a painted portrait. And he addresses the disjunction between the expression and the sentiment of love, worrying at the problem of speaking his love using a medium and a vocabulary that has grown conventionalized and thus carries the suspicion of professionalism.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 7–10; Giacomo da Lentini, *Poesie*, 30–33⁶²

Wondrously
a love distresses me
and fills my thoughts at every moment.
Like a man whose mind is occupied
elsewhere, who paints
a portrait of those thoughts,
so, Beauty, do I:
within my heart
I carry your image.

5

In my heart it seems that I carry you,
depicted as you appear,
though outside it is not apparent.
On the contrary, it is like death:
I do not know whether you know
that I love you with all my heart,
for I am so timid
that I watch you with secret glances
and I do not show you my love.

10

15

Out of my great desire
I painted an image
resembling you, Beauty;
and when I do not see you
I look at that picture,
and it seems that I have you before me:
like a man who believes

20

25

62. In general, I have used Panvini as the basis for these translations, but have compared his editions and commentary with other published editions and with manuscript variants.

he is saved by virtue of his faith,
though he sees nothing before him.⁶³

Thus a sorrow burns within me,
like a man who holds a flame
concealed within his breast:
the more he covers it,
the further it spreads,
and it cannot be contained;
so do I burn
when I pass and do not look
at you, amorous countenance.

30

If I have praised you,
my lady, in many places
for the beauty you possess,
I do not know whether you have been told
that it is but a poet's game,
and whether that causes you pain:
know by the signs of my appearance
what I would tell you in words
when you see me.

40

45

If, when I pass you, I do not turn
physically toward you,
Beauty, to behold you,
still with every step as I go
I release a sigh
for the anguish you cause me.
Well should I be anxious,
for I scarcely know myself,
so marked am I by suffering.⁶⁴

50

Fresh little song,
go sing a new theme:
rise up in the morning
before the most beautiful,
the flower of every amorous lady,
fairer than fine gold:

55

63. A difficult line: the lover compares himself to a man who believes despite the physical absence of the object of his faith. The most obvious reference is to religious faith, and this interpretation is supported by the vocabulary used in the two preceding lines: "like a man who believes he is *saved* by virtue of his *faith*."

64. The notion of love as a wasting disease, and the lover's wonder at its physical toll, was diffuse in medieval love poetry. Compare, for instance, Ibn Hamdis's "You tortured me with the two elements" (above, p. 138).

“Your love, which is precious,
do give to the Notary
who is from the city of Lentino.”

60

“Amor non vole”

This poem has been called a “manifesto” of Sicilian poetics (see above, p. 79, as well as the discussion of this poem, pp. 78–80). In addition to the striking use of “Oriental” gemstones to illustrate the poet’s perception of love in general and his love *poetry* in particular, observe Giacomo’s focus on one of his most insistent themes: the problem of expressing an essentially hermetic sentiment. Giacomo’s love poet is torn between the theatricality of the love poem and the premise on which it is based: that it expresses the most private and personal of sentiments.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 11–12; Giacomo da Lentini, *Poesie*, 64–66

Love does not wish me to claim
Mercy,⁶⁵ which every man demands,
nor that I pride myself on loving,
because every man that loves is proud:
for the service that every man
knows how to perform has no name,⁶⁶
and what everybody knows
is not worthy of praise.
To you, Beauty, such a gift
I would not wish to present.

5

10

For this reason love has taught me
not to look to other people:
he does not wish me to resemble a monkey,
that apes whatever it sees.
And for this reason, my lady,
I would not ask from you
mercy nor pity:
there are so many lovers
that mercy has lost its taste
from overuse.

15

20

Every gem that is more rare
is held to be more precious;
even though it is not valuable
it is appreciated more than the others.

65. *Merzede*, like its Occitan cognate *merce*, is a key courtly term signifying the lady’s gracious acquiescence to the lover’s desire to love her. The word appears at least once in each of the five stanzas of this poem.

66. That is, it is common, and of no value.

For, if it is Oriental,
the sapphire is worth that much more,
though it has less power.
And for this reason my heart
does not consent to plead for mercy,
because overuse has cheapened such pleas.

25

Cheapened are the turquoises
of that remembered age,
that were so gay and fine—
no one found delight in them.
May mercies be restricted,
may they not be mentioned anywhere,
so that they might appear to be new delights;
may they not be sung of anywhere,
nor called on by lovers,
until nine years have passed.

35

Without mercy you can
know well my desire,
for you see me much better
than I see myself.
However, if it seems right to you
to have something else that ought not to be
in order to possess your love,
don't throw away your favors:⁶⁷
do you want that sort of love?
Rather, I would prefer to die.

45

50

“Or come pote sì gran donna intrare”

The Sicilian poets of the thirteenth century invented a prosodic form that was to become and remain the most popular lyric form in the West: the sonnet. In the two following poems, the essential thematic structure of the sonnet is already well developed. The poems focus on the elaboration of a simple but evocative conceit. The poet lays out the motif in the opening octave and comments on it in the final six lines of the poem. In both of these sonnets, a conceit drawn from observation of natural phenomena finds a satisfying emotional resolution in the concluding tercet. “Or come pote,” in particular, should be read as a companion to “Maravigliosamente”: in the sonnet, the poet handles the optical theory at the heart of both poems with a bracing literalism.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 45; Giacomo da Lentini, *Poesie*, 291

Now, how can so large a woman enter

67. The word “favors” translates a key word used earlier in the poem: *gioia*. The word can mean “gemstone” (as it does above, in line 21) or “delights, pleasures, happiness.”

through my eyes, which are so small?
 And how can she stay in my heart
 within which I carry her, wherever I go?
 The place where she enters has not yet appeared, 5
 which causes me to wonder greatly;
 but I wish to liken her to light,
 and my eyes to the glass within which it is placed:
 The fire within then passes outside
 its light, without breaking it; 10
 so, through the eyes, there passes to the heart
 not her person, but her image.
 I wish to renew myself with love,
 since I carry the imprint of such a creature.⁶⁸

“A l’aire claro ò vista ploggia dare”

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 48; Giacomo da Lentini, *Poesie*, 309–10

I have seen a clear sky give rain
 and darkness produce light,
 and blazing fire become ice,
 and cold snow produce heat,
 and a sweet thing become bitter 5
 and bitterness transformed to sweetness,
 and two warriors come to perfect peace,
 and hostility born between two friends.
 And I have seen from Love something more remarkable:
 for I was wounded, and wounding it cured me; 10
 the fire that burned me was doused with fire;
 the life it gave me was my death.
 I burn now with the fire which extinguished me—
 the fire of love, that drew me to itself.⁶⁹

68. These are difficult lines. Some modern editors translate: “I wish to remember love,” hence “I wish to demonstrate my gratitude to love”; others prefer (as I do) “I wish to renew myself with love”: I wish love to mark a new beginning to my life. The final line merges natural philosophy with amorous psychology. Giacomo asserts that he carries within the internal image of the woman, which, according to medieval optical theory, leaves a physical imprint (*insegna*) in the viewer’s eye.

69. A difficult line, with a number of manuscript variants. I accept Antonelli’s suggestion (“d’amor mi trasse e misemi in su’ loco”; see Giacomo, *Poesie*, 310), which preserves intact the reading of the most authoritative manuscript and does not seem to present substantial difficulties.

FREDERICK II
“Dolze meo drudo”

This dialogue poem between a lady and her lover is attributed, in the one manuscript in which it is preserved, to Frederick II. And indeed the tone of the opening stanzas—in which both lady and lover meditate on the pain of separation, but more pointedly defend the bureaucratic justification of the separation (a military expedition)—seems to support the attribution to the emperor. For a discussion of this poem, see above, pp. 90–91.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 423–24; Frederick II, *Rime*, 6–7

“My sweet lover, be off!
 My lord, I commend you to God:
 for you are leaving me,
 and, wretched, I remain.
 Alas, life is a burden to me,
 death is sweet to see;
 for I don’t think I will ever be healed
 thinking that I will know no joy.

5

Thinking that you go away,
 my heart makes war against me.
 That which I most desire
 a distant land takes from me.
 Now my love goes away,
 whom more than any man I love;
 I blame Tuscany,
 which has broken my heart.”

10

15

“My sweet woman, my going
 is not by my own will:
 for I must obey
 the one who has power over me.
 Now take comfort if I go,
 and don’t lose spirit—
 for I will never betray you, love,
 by loving any other.”

20

25

“It is your love that keeps me⁷⁰
 and holds me in its power,
 for it happens that I love you

70. Here the form of address changes from *tu* (the familiar) to *voi* (the formal). This stanza may also be spoken by the lover, rather than the lady.

faithfully and without deceit.

May you remember me,
may you not forget me;
for you hold in your power
all of my desire.”

30

“My sweet lady, a farewell
I request without delay;
may you wish me well,
for my heart remains with you.
Such is the fascination
of our amorous pleasures
that I cannot go away
from you, lady, by my faith.”

35

40

MAZZEO DI RICCO

“*Sei anni ò travagliato*”

In this poem—one of the most satisfying of the Sicilian corpus—the poet uses familiar poetic motifs to pleasing effect. It is in part the poem’s conceit that infuses these potential clichés with vivacity: this is not a love poem, but the complaint of a man who is liberating himself from the burden of love for a cruel mistress. The fresh and innocent image of the child chasing bright things at the close of the first stanza parallels light and love and plays perception against reality, as many of Giacomo’s poems do. The second stanza, like the central stanzas of Giacomo’s “Amor non vole,” turns on the image of a gemstone as symbol of something perceived (in error) to possess value and uses a Sicilian word derived from the Arabic to refer to the stone. And the economic imagery that closes the final stanza returns us to the quantitative logic of the poem’s opening line and suggests, reassuringly, that the damage caused by bad love can be quantified and contained.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 210–11

I have labored for six years
in loving you, my lady,
and I have kept my pledge to you
more even than I can describe
and more than I can say.

Indeed, your love
has cost me dear;
for it has so betrayed me
with its sweet speech
that I can scarce believe it.

Truly, the folly
of a child led me—

5

10

a child that believes firmly
 that he can pluck the sun from sparkling water,
 and who believes that he can clasp the brilliance
 of a burning candle,
 whereupon he immediately
 runs off, crying, feeling the heat.

15

If I have noticed tardily
 my own foolishness
 I hold myself fortunate,
 because I am about to leave behind
 the evil that held me;
 for the man who is sick,
 as soon as he returns to health,
 forgets altogether
 the evil that has passed
 and the great suffering.
 Alas—that I believed,
 lady, in perfect faith
 that your affections
 surpassed sapphires⁷¹ in brilliance!
 Now I see well that your color
 is nothing more than glass;
 for the masters know well
 how to counterfeit their work.

20

25

30

35

Hope deceived me
 and made me stray so far,
 like a man who has wagered
 and thinks that he is gaining
 and loses what he has.
 Now I see that it is proven
 what I have heard tell,
 that he has gained enough
 who knows how to free himself

40

45

71. The word that Mazzeo uses here (*jachiti*) is derived ultimately from a Greco-Latin root (Lat. *hyacinthus*-*os*, a transliteration of the Greek), which generated a number of cognates in modern languages, including the Italian *giacinto* and the English hyacinth. However, in terms of both lexical range and phonetics, the Sicilian *jachitu* seems to be most closely related to an Arabic word also derived from the Greco-Latin *hyacinthus*. The Arabic *yaqut* can mean “hyacinth,” as the modern Italian *giacinto* and the Sicilian *jachitu* do. It can also—like its Greek and Latin root, but unlike other modern cognates—mean “sapphire.” (Ibn Hamdis uses the word, which I have translated as “gem,” in his poem “In youth, the soul attains its desire”; see above, p. 132, v. 8.) Here, it seems obvious that Mazzeo is drawing on the second meaning of the Arabic word (and its Greco-Latin root), lost in the modern languages of the West; and so I have translated it “sapphires.”

from evil companions.
 It happened to me
 as it happens often
 to one who in good faith lends
 his own to a wicked and ungrateful debtor,
 in that a man goes often
 to an ill-spirited payer
 and has nothing in return,
 and so in the end he complains about it.

50

RINALDO D'AQUINO

“*Già mai non mi conforto*”

The lament of the woman who watches her lover set sail on crusade was a set piece for medieval Romance poets. This poem distinguishes itself from the crowd by virtue of the simplicity and elegance of its language, and the lady's rather blunt criticism of the crusade that separates her from her lover. The poem is preserved in only one manuscript, and there are a variety of difficulties with the text. The meter of the poem is far from certain. And in some places the text seems to have been corrupted in transmission, presumably because of the difficulty that the Sicilian original presented for northern copyists. Where these difficulties affect the translation, they are noted. For a discussion of the poem, see above, pp. 86–87.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 105–9

Never will I be comforted,
 nor do I wish to be cheered.
 The ships have arrived at port
 and are about to set sail.⁷²
 The noblest of men is leaving
 for a land across the sea;
 and I, alas, forlorn—
 what am I to do?

5

He leaves for another land
 and he sends no one to tell me,
 and I have been deceived:

10

72. The verb “colare” in this line (“e vogliono colare”), and the related noun “colle” in verse 49 below (“Le navi sone a le colle”), have presented substantial difficulties to modern editors. A number of Italian words derived from various Latin roots are phonetically similar to these words, but do not fit the context. It seems more plausible to conjecture that both the verb and the noun are derived from the Sicilian Arabic *qal'*, meaning “sail of a ship” (see Dionisius Agius, *Siculo Arabic*, 205).

there are so many sighs,
they wage a great war against me
both night and day;
neither in heaven nor on earth
do I seem to dwell.

15

Holy, holy, holy God,
who came to the Virgin,
save and keep my love,
since you have taken him away from me.
Oh high power,
reverenced and feared,
may my sweet love
be commended to your safekeeping!

20

25

The cross saves the people—
and it is my undoing.
The cross is the source of my pain,
and my prayers to God do me no good.
O pilgrims' cross,
why have you destroyed me?
Poor wretched me—
I am all in flames!

30

The Emperor rules
all the world in peace—
and on me he makes war,
for he has taken away my hope.
Oh high power,
reverenced and feared,
may my sweet love
be commended to your safekeeping!

35

40

When he took the cross,
he certainly did not think of me—
that man who loved me so,
and I loved him so.
For I was battered for his sake,
and thrown in prison,
and held in a cell
every moment of my life!

45

50

The ships have hoisted their sails;
may they have a propitious journey,
the ships, and my love,
and the people who must travel there!
O Father Creator,

55

lead them to port,
for they go to serve
the holy Cross.

And so I pray, Duccetto⁷³—
you who know my suffering—
that you make me a sonnet
and send it to Syria.
For I can find no rest
day or night;
my life lies
in the land across the sea!

60

65

GUIDO DELLE COLONNE

“Ancor che l’raigua per lo foco lassi”

In this poem, Guido merges the language of natural philosophy and the vocabulary of love. The first and last stanzas meditate on the role of an intermediary element in allowing or hindering the capacity of a natural force to affect an inert object. In the first stanza, fire changes the temperature of water, but only so long as there is an intermediary to prevent the water from dousing the fire. The vessel that protects the fire of love from being extinguished, and hence allows the fire to warm the poet without consuming him, is the lady. The magnet, which must have the “consent” of the air to attract iron, represents the power of love, mediated through the accommodating form of the lady, in the final stanza. The amorous content does not bear close analysis in this closing stanza. The *dramatis personae* (the air as the lady, the magnet as Love, and a piece of iron performing the role of lover) is already quite abstract. When a bevy of subsidiary ladies is introduced in the final lines of the stanza, the metaphor collapses under their weight: do they represent *unconsenting* particles of air? Or perhaps iron filings, attracted to the lover who now himself acts as intermediary? The reader may choose to disregard the romantic back story at this point and enjoy what seems at any rate to be the primary action—the scientific drama bringing irresistible forces into contact with inert objects.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 79–82

Although water, because of fire, loses
its intense coldness,
it would not change its nature
if some vessel did not stand in the middle;
rather, it would happen without a great delay

5

⁷³. The manuscript gives “Dolcietto,” “little sweet one.” I accept Panvini’s amendment, “Duccetto,” which is a conceivable diminutive formed from the poet’s name, Rinaldo.

that the fire would be extinguished,
or the water would dry up;
but because of the intermediary, the one and the other both endure.
So, gentle creature,
Love did in me display
his burning force:
for without Love, I was cold water and ice,
but Love illuminated me so
with a fire that engulfed me
that I would have been consumed
if you, sovereign lady,
had not been the intermediary
between me and Love,
which brings forth fire from snow.

One can call a man who never
felt the heat of love
the very image of snow;
although he is alive, he does not know how to be happy.

Love is an ardent spirit
that cannot be seen;
only because of the sighs
does it make itself known in one who loves.

So, honorable lady,
my great sighs
can make you certain

of the amorous flame that engulfs me;
and I don't know how I endure—
she has taken hold of me
and it seems certain to me
that many other lovers,
each of them because of love,
were condemned to death—

and they did not love with the intensity I do.

I love you so, one thousand times
in an hour my spirit
wearies and wavers,
contemplating, lady, your beauty.
And the desire that defeats my heart
makes my passion grow
and casts my every thought
into confusion, for it never abates.
O vivid and ivory-skinned⁷⁴

74. The phrase that Guido uses—“colorita e blanca” (colored and white)—though a commonplace among medieval love poets, does not translate easily into modern English. The reference

joy, a hope
 that good will come to me sustains me;
 and though I languish I cannot die,
 for while you are alive,
 I cannot falter,
 though hunger and thirst
 torment my body—
 but, so long as I just think
 of your lovely being,
 I forget death, it gives me so much strength.

50

I do not believe it to be the same that I had,
 the spirit that I now hold;
 for I should already be dead,
 I have suffered so much and for so long.
 The spirit I have, which animates me,
 I believe to be yours;
 it resides in my chest
 and abides with me in joy and pleasure.

60

Now, I have indeed noticed
 when I come to you
 that, when I hold your loving face
 in my thoughts, clear and bright,
 your pleasing eyes
 overwhelm me at that moment;
 for they remain fixed in my mind
 and they hide within me
 a spirit of love,
 that makes me love much more,
 it seems to me, than any other loved before.

70

The magnet—so say the wise men—
 could not attract
 iron through its strength
 if the air that stands between does not consent it;
 the magnet may well be rock,
 but other rocks are not
 nearly strong enough
 to attract [iron], because they do not have the power.
 So, my lady,
 Love noticed
 that he would not be able

80

85

is to the lady whose white skin is set off by the high color of her hair, her lips, her fashionable clothing and jewelry. Compare Abu Musa's description of his beloved, "a ruby sheathed in silver and crowned with carnelian" (above, p. 139, v. 4).

to attract me to himself, if not by means of you.
 Though there are many ladies,
 they have no means
 to make me move
 if not through you, fair one,
 in whom abides firmly
 the strength and the power.
 And so I pray Love to help me.

90

95

ANONYMOUS

“Oi lassa ‘namorata”

This anonymous poem in the voice of a lady describes the torment inflicted by a faithless lover. Typical of anonymous poetry in the feminine voice, the poem is written in a vigorous and straightforward style; it is not cluttered with citations of natural philosophy, or other evidence of intellectual ambition; and it imagines, in vivid detail, a satisfying revenge against those responsible for the beloved's unhappiness. For a discussion of this poem, see above, pp. 84–85.

SOURCE: Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 461

Oh, forlorn and in love!
 I wish to recount my life
 and to tell often
 how love attracted me;
 for I am—though I have done no wrong—
 burdened by torments
 because of one whom I love and want
 and whom I do not hold in my power
 as I used to do;
 therefore I endure anguish
 and now pride guides me,
 my heart wounds and assails me.

5

10

Oh, forlorn and unhappy!
 How love has taken hold of me!
 For his love summons me,
 he who has conquered me.
 His beautiful figure
 has taken delight and laughter from me
 and has reduced me to suffering.
 I don't believe I'll have it good again
 unless death comes to my aid;
 I wait for it to come,
 and rescue me from this fate.

15

20

Alas—how he told me
when he met me in secret:
“Oh, my life, with you
I feel that I am richer
than if I had all the world
under my command.”³⁰

And now he has disdain for me
and pretends he doesn’t know me—
it seems that he has another love.
Oh God, may the one who competes with me
die from a nasty wound
and without making confession!³⁵

Oh, wicked and savage fate!
Save me from this suffering!
Act swiftly so that I do not die
if my lord does not deign
to love me—for his words
to me were sweet,
and he made me love him
beyond all measure.
Now his heart has changed;
know that, if this situation persists,
like a desperate man
I will resign myself to fate.⁷⁵

Go, fine song,
to the lucky man;
wound him in his heart
if you find him disdainful.
Don’t wound him violently—
that would be too grievous—
but wound her who holds him,
kill her without fail!
Then I know that he will come to me,
my bright-faced love;⁷⁶
and I will be saved from suffering,
and I will have happiness and joy.

75. That is, I will resign myself to what happens—no matter how dark that fate may be. One possible outcome, presumably the one desired by the lady, is sketched in the next stanza.

⁷⁶ “Lo viso del cristallo”: literally, “Face of crystal”

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 293 and 301; *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 335 and 343–44. For a translation of the relevant passages, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pages 148–51.

2. *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 295, 298, and 299; *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 337 and 341.

3. Umberto Rizzitano notes that the relative barbarity of cultural life on the island during the first century of Muslim rule can be attributed, in part, to this fact; Siculo-Arabic culture would have developed more rapidly if it had encountered and interacted with a more vibrant culture on the island (Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia saracena*, 258–59).

4. See, e.g., Marcello Gigante’s *Poeti bizantini di Terra d’Otranto*, and Francesca Maria Corrao’s *Poeti arabi di Sicilia*, which covers the Arabic poets of the years of Muslim as well as Norman rule. These works are anthologies, with introductory essays on the literary history in which the poets are to be placed. To my knowledge, the only monograph on the literary culture of the Norman period that surveys production in Arabic, Greek, and Latin is Antonino de Stefano’s cultural history of Norman Sicily, *La cultura in Sicilia nel periodo normanno*.

5. Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public*, 11.

6. See Brian Stock, “Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism,” in *Listening for the Text*, 52–74.

7. For a discussion of medieval cultural complexity with particular relevance to Sicily, see Menocal’s pages on Frederick II (61–64), and “Italy, Dante, and the Anxieties of Influence,” in *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 115–35.

8. See Suzanne Fleischman, “Medieval Vernaculars and the Myth of Monoglossia.”

9. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Un Souffle d’Allemagne ayant passé,” 2; Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century,” 613–14; María Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love*, 106–21.

10. Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 38 and 41.

11. This text is cited and discussed in James Monroe, “*Zajal* and *Muwashshaha*,” 413.

12. In fact, it seems that *Hebrew* poets resident in Sicily did produce *muwashshahat* (see Jefim Schirmann, *Zur Geschichte der hebraischen Poesie in Apulien und Sizilien*). But those works lie outside my linguistic competence, and outside the scope of this study.

13. Matthew of Paris, *Historia Maior*, 762.

Chapter 2

1. For La Zisa, see Michele Amari, *Epigrafi*, 80–82. Amari reports that, at a party at the Parisian house of the duke of Serradifalco (who would later send the rubbings

of the epigraphs from La Zisa to Paris for Amari to decipher), the duke asserted that the Cuba was an Arab palace, only to hear Girault de Prangey, a French historian of architecture, respond that it was Norman. Two years later, Amari's interpretation of the epigraphs proved de Prangey right (*Epigrafi*, 83). For the Cuba, see Amari, *Diari*, 178; *Epigrafi*, 82–99.

2. In fact, one of Vella's manuscripts apparently surfaced in the United States more than a century later; see Richard Gottheil, "Two Forged Antiques." It is now held by the library of Columbia University.

3. Giovanni Meli, *Opere*, 2: 957.

4. On Vella's fraud, see Michele Amari, *Storia*, 1: 6–11. Sicilian novelist Leonardo Sciascia wrote a fictionalized version of the episode, a sensitive study in particular of the political situation of Vella's career, titled *Il consiglio d'Egitto*.

5. Amari, *Storia*, 3: 921–22.

6. *Lessico universale italiano*, s.v. Amari, Michele.

7. Michele Amari, *Carteggio*, 2: 208.

8. Michele Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula: Versione italiana*, 64.

9. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, 305; *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 348.

10. Amari, *Epigrafi*, 81.

11. Staale Sinding-Larsen, "Plura ordinantor ad unum," 69; Jeremy Johns, "I re normanni e i califfi fatimiti," 25.

12. On the Normans' use of 'alamat, and other cultural practices imported during the Norman era, see Johns, "I re normanni e i califfi fatimiti."

13. Romualdo Salernitano, *Chronicon*, 232–33.

14. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, 160–61.

15. Francesco Gabrieli, "Ibn Hamdis," 27.

16. It was Amari, again, who identified the monarch to whom 'Imad al-Din referred; see his *Biblioteca arabo-sicula: Versione italiana*, 257.

17. For the text of this poem, see Ihsan 'Abbas, *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 54–55. For translations into Italian, see Amari, *Storia*, 3: 778–80; Gabrieli, "Ibn Hamdis," 26–27; Corrao, *Poeti arabi di Sicilia*, 164–67.

18. Traditionally scholars have interpreted al-Atrabanishi's dualist imagery to mean that there were originally two game-fish ponds within the park, or that the poet intended with this dual noun to make reference to another park as well as Favara. See e.g. Amari, *Storia*, 3: 778–79; Gabrieli, "Ibn Hamdis," 26; Henri Bresc, "I giardini palermitani," 370.

19. For a translation of the full text of this poem, see the "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 139–40.

20. For the trilingual psalter, Harley 5786, see Andrew G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts*, vol. 1, # 838, and vol. 2, fig. 84. On funerary epigraphy, see Barbara Zeitler, "Urbs felix dotata populo trilingui."

21. Ibn Hamdis, *Diwan*, 274. For a translation of this *qasida*, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 134–37.

22. 'Abbas, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 51. For a fragment from another anti-Norman ode, see the translation of Abu Musa's *qasida* in "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 138–39.

23. 'Abbas, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 60

24. For translations of al-Buthayri's and Abu al-Daw's works, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 140–44.

25. For a translation of section of al-Idrisi's introduction to the geography, describing the method used to compile it, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 146–48.

26. Marcello Gigante, *Eugenii Panormitani Versus Iambici*, 59, vv. 177–79.

27. Evelyn Jamison, *Admiral Eugenius of Sicily*, 126–27.

28. Valentin Rose, "Zu Diogenes Laërtes," 388–89. Reto R. Bezzola comments on this introduction that "one could not find a more convincing passage to prove the tight links that public opinion of the epoch perceived between the glory of letters and the glory of arms" (*Origines*, 506).

For translations of the introductions to the *Phaedo* and the *Almagest*, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 154–58.

29. Petrus Ansolini de Ebulo, *De rebus siculis carmen*: see p. 15, v. 56 for the description of the mourning for William; table 7 for the painting of the Norman court. For another, less frequently reproduced image from this manuscript, see the image of the Saracen doctors treating William and Palermo mourning him, opposite p. 49 below; for a translation of Peter's lament for William, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 161–62.

And for another memorable verse epic of the era, see William of Apulia's *De rebus gestis Roberti Wiscardii*, celebrating the exploits of the warrior who masterminded the initial Norman invasion of Sicily.

30. Alexandri Telesini Abbatis *Ystoria Rogerii*, 89; Geoffrey Malaterra, *De Rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae*, 3. For other relatively straightforward (i.e., nonliterary) historical accounts of the Norman rule in Sicily, see Amato di Montecassino's *Storia de' Normanni*, which survives only in a medieval French translation; Rycardus de Sancto Germano's *Chronica*; the *Chronicon* by Romualdo Salernitano; and Falcone Beneventano's *Chronicon*.

31. While the identity of the author of both the history and the letter remains a mystery, it seems certain that "Hugo Falcandus" was *not* his name. The name was attached to the work in the first published edition (1550), but is not found in any historical Sicilian documents, nor attested to in the text.

32. Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia*, 171. For a translation of passages from the *Epistola de calamitate Siciliae*, see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 158–60.

33. There are some traces of French literary production in Sicily. Jendeu de Brie, while in Sicily (around 1170), wrote a work that one wishes had survived: an epic poem, called *Aleschans*, about the struggle of the Christians against the Saracens in France. (See de Stefano, *La cultura in Sicilia nel periodo normanno*, 74.)

34. For a fuller discussion of the tarí, see my "Translating Sicily."

35. See John Julius Norwich, *The Normans in Sicily*, 155. This verse seemed to resonate for the Normans. It was used as Roger II's device in his *rotae* (see Karl Andreas Kehr, *Die Urkunden der normannisch-sizilischen Könige*, 172; Jozsef Deér, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, 157). And Tancredi produced a coin with "khalada-llah mulka-hu" ("may God perpetuate his reign") on one side and "Dextera Domini exaltavit me" on the other (Jeremy Johns, "I titoli arabi dei sovrani normanni di Sicilia," 21–22).

36. Hartwig Derenbourg, *Opuscules d'un Arabisant*, 92. For other biographies with a balanced and inclusive view of Amari's career, see in particular Illuminato Peri, *Michele Amari*, and Rosario Romeo, *Mezzogiorno e Sicilia nel Risorgimento*.

37. Amari, *Diari*, 24.

38. Michele Amari, *La Guerra del Vespro siciliano*, 1851 edition, 1: viii. The fourth edition was published nine years after the first, 1842 edition.

39. Peri, *Michele Amari*, 101. Peri also calls *La Guerra del Vespro siciliano* an “epopea della sicilianicità” (84).

40. Amari, *Carteggio*, 1: 145.

41. Amari, *Diari*, 167.

42. Amari, *Carteggio*, 1: 53 and 1: 144–45.

43. *Ibid.*, 1: 196.

44. Amari, *Storia*, 3: 921.

45. In the twentieth-century edition, the *Storia* has 1,097 pages on Muslim Sicily and 922 pages (175 pages, or about 16 per cent, less) on Norman Sicily. In this regard, one should note the significance of his title—*Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, rather than *Storia della Sicilia musulmana*.

46. *Ibid.*, 1: 105 and 107.

47. Amari, *Diari*, 56 and 60.

48. Amari, *Storia*, 3: 685 and 921.

49. Benedetto Croce, *Storia della storiografia italiana*, 30 and 32.

50. “In the middle of the nineteenth century, Amari is stuck between the 1700s and the 1800s . . .” (Giorgio Falco, “A proposito della nuova edizione della ‘Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia’ di Michele Amari,” 362).

51. Michele Amari, *La Guerra del Vespro siciliano*, 1843 edition, 26.

52. On Amari, see also my “Orientalism and the Nineteenth-Century Nationalist: Michele Amari, Ernest Renan, and 1848.”

53. Amari, *Diari*, 71 and 75. In fact, some light may be shed on the second entry: Amari had apparently discovered archives crucial to the history of “i nostri musulmani,” and this may be the event memorialized here. He was, furthermore, an avid hunter, and this notation may record a day on which, in the company of friends, he “dishonored Sicily” by shooting poorly (see Amari, *Diari*, 32–33, n. 44).

54. Amari, *Carteggio*, 2: 278.

55. Amari, *Diari*, 166.

Chapter 3

1. Ryccardus de Sancto Germano, *Chronica*, 7, vv. 15–17.

2. Frederick II, *De arte venandi cum avibus*, 6 and 4. For a translation of Frederick's introduction to the *De arte venandi*, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 162–64.

3. Falcandus, *Historia*, 173–74. For a translation of selections from this document, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 158–60.

4. *Ibid.*, 171; see “Texts in Translation” (below), p. 159.

5. *Ibid.*, 118 and 127. Consideration of the linguistic complexity of the Sicilian court suggests that chauvinism, rather than a passion for historical veracity, motivated this observation.

6. For a translation of Peter of Eboli's lament, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 161–62.

7. Petrus Ansolini de Ebulo, *De rebus siculis carmen*, 15, particula III, v. 56.

8. Apuleius, *Met.* XI, 5; Ovid, *Met.* XIII, 724.

9. J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 930–31.

10. Already in a letter of 1221, Frederick makes reference to “Nuceria Christianorum”—Lucera of the Christians. It is possible that he thereby designates, through a circumlocution disavowing the Muslims’ presence, precisely *Muslim* Lucera; or that he uses the name to refer specifically to the Christian institutions—in particular, the churches and their personnel and financial holdings—in the process of being displaced. See Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 119.

11. See Frederick’s letter to Pope Gregory defending his Arab policy in Lucera: Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 828–32.

12. Pietro Egidi assumes that Lucera and the surrounding territory were underpopulated (Egidi, *La colonia saracena di Lucera e la sua distruzione*, 10). Jean-Marie Martin, in a more recent article on Lucera, disagrees with Egidi on this point, asserting that the region was populated and thus attributing to Frederick’s constitution of the Muslim colony there a more aggressive quality (Martin, “La colonie sarrasine de Lucera et son environnement,” 798).

13. Rycardus de Sancto Germano, *Chronica*, 216; Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. cxcii.

14. Egidi, *La colonia saracena*, 33. On the palace at Lucera, see Nunzio Tomaiuoli, “Il ‘Palatium’ di Lucera”; and D. B. Whitehouse, “Ceramiche e vetri medioevali provenienti dal castello di Lucera.”

15. Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 5, pt. 1, pp. 486–87.

16. Ibid., vol. 6, pt. 1, p. 325. See also a letter written a year later, in 1246, which uses almost identical language to condemn Frederick’s character (ibid., vol. 6, pt. 1, pp. 427–28).

17. Ibid., vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 405.

18. Ibid., vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 452, 457–58.

19. See Egidi, *La colonia saracena*, 37. For documents relating to Lucera, see the “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 164–68.

20. Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 6, pt. 2, p. 807.

21. On the significance of Theodore’s and Michael’s titles, see Charles Burnett, “Master Theodore, Frederick II’s Astrologer,” 248–50.

22. Michele Amari, “Questions philosophiques,” 258–59.

23. Ibid., 262–64.

24. Ibid., 259.

25. Ibid., 266.

26. On Averroes’s sons, see Charles Burnett’s “The ‘Sons of Averroes with the Emperor Frederick’ and the Transmission of the Philosophical Works by Ibn Rushd.” For a survey of records demonstrating the presence and activities of Jewish scholars in Sicily, see Colette Sirat, “Les traducteurs juifs à la cour des rois de Sicile et de Naples.” See also Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Lo studio dell’Islam in Europa*, 27–30, for

a brief but tantalizing précis of the translators who seem to have worked in Sicily during the thirteenth century. The authoritative reference on the translators of Sicily remains Haskins (see in particular “Sicilian Translators of the Twelfth Century” [155–90] and “Michael Scot” [272–98] in *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*).

27. Charles Burnett, “Master Theodore,” 229.
28. Sylvie-Marie Steiner, *Le livre de Sidrach*, 25.
29. Ibid., 26–27. For a translation of the introduction to *Sydrach*, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 168–71.
30. Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 5, pt. 1, pp. 535–36. As further evidence of his omnivorous cultural appetites, in this same letter Frederick also directs his minister to seek black slaves (“servi nigri”) who are trained to play musical instruments.
31. Matthew also repeats the famous story that Frederick has claimed that the world has been seduced by three “crafty and deceitful imposters: Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad,” and relates that Frederick is reported to have called the Eucharist “nonsense.” Matthew of Paris, *Ex Mathei Parisiensis Cronicis maioribus*, 147.
32. Amari, “Questions philosophiques,” 267.

Chapter 4

1. See also Dante, *Convivio* IV, iii, 6.
2. See l’Ottimo Commento on *Inferno* XXVIII, 17 and Buti on *Inferno* XXVIII, 7–21. Benvenuto (in his comments on *Inferno* X, 15–18) and Boccaccio (see his comments on *Inferno* X, 119), however, accurately attribute the founding of Lucera to Frederick.
3. See the comments on *Inferno* XXVIII, 15.
4. Walter Binni, “Canto III,” 726.
5. Dante alludes to the provocations of Manfredi’s character, in addition, by drawing a striking parallel between Manfredi’s self-presentation and the manner in which the prophet Muhammad displays himself to the pilgrim in the *Inferno*, and by inserting into Manfredi’s canto a suggestive engagement of a problematic Averroistic doctrine—the concept of the possible intellect (see my “Dante e l’Islam: Sul canto III del *Purgatorio*”).
6. Niccolò Jamsilla, *Delle geste di Federico II*, 108. Jamsilla continues his riff on Manfredi’s name, calling him “manus Frederici” (Frederick’s hand), “mens Frederici sive memoria Frederici” (Frederick’s mind or memory), and “Mons Frederici, sive munitio Frederici” (the Mount or the fortification of Frederick), since he preserves the glory of Frederick: “so that, however one varies the etymology of his name, the paternal power and name are found therein.”
7. See the discussion of Frederick’s poetry below (pp. 90–92), and the translation of his poem “Dolze meo drudo” in “Texts in Translation” (pp. 177–78).
8. For a valuable summary of Frederick’s peregrinations, see Carlrichard Bruehl, “L’itinerario italiano dell’imperatore: 1220–1250.”
9. Aurelio Roncagli, “Le corti medievali,” 129.
10. For details, see Roberto Antonelli, “La corte ‘italiana’ di Federico II,” 343, n. 78.
11. Roncaglia, “Le corti medievali,” 134; Furio Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 265.
12. Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 4–5.

13. Vincenzo Consolo, *Di qua dal faro*, 211; Corrao, *Poeti arabi di sicilia*, xliv.

14. See Roncaglia, “Le corti medievali,” 141–43; and cp. Panvini’s dating of Giacomo’s “La ’namoranza disiusa” to a much earlier date, 1204 or 1205, which is disputed by Roncaglia (Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 14–15).

15. On the insular pedigree of the poets, see Rosario Coluccia, “Storia editoriale e formazione del canone,” 39–40. On the poets’ access to Frederick, see the biographical details for some of the poets of the first generation collected by Bruno Panvini, *Poeti italiani della corte di Federico II*, xxvi–xxx.

16. Furio Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 295.

17. See Bruni’s discussion of the referentiality of the Sicilian poets, which examines their readings of both troubadour and Sicilian models: Francesco Bruni, “La cultura alla corte di Federico II e la lirica siciliana,” 241–56.

18. Roberto Antonelli, “La corte ‘italiana’ di Federico II,” 330.

19. See, for instance, Gianfranco Folena, “Cultura e poesia dei siciliani,” 314; Furio Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 265–68.

20. For the most striking reading of the Arabic origin of the sonnet, see Ernest Hatch Wilkins, “The Invention of the Sonnet.” In the first published version of this paper (1915), Wilkins posited an Arabic origin (490–92). When the article was reprinted in an edited volume (1959), Wilkins relates that he had originally contemplated an Arabic provenance for the form, “but this suggestion now seems to me to be negligible” (35). For an overview of the *querelle* on the origins of the sonnet, and an analytic bibliography, see Christopher Kleinhenz, *The Early Italian Sonnet*, 21–33.

21. Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 111–13. For other uses of fire imagery to represent the force, the mechanism, or the pains of love, see Giacomo’s “Madonna dir vi voglio,” with its reference to the salamander that can live within fire (vv. 27–28); his sonnets “Or come pote sì gran donna intrare” and “A l’aire claro ò vista plogia dare”; Tommaso di Sasso’s “D’amoroso paese”; Guido delle Colonne’s “Ancor che l’aigua per lo foco lassi”; Rinaldo d’Aquino’s “Ormai quando flore”; and Jacopo Mostacci’s “A pena pare ch’io saccia cantare.” For translations of Giacomo’s “A l’aire claro” and Guido’s “Ancor che l’aigua,” see “Texts in Translation,” pp. 176 and 182–85.

22. On optical theory in Giacomo’s sonnet, see my “Arabic and Italian Lyric in Medieval Sicily.”

23. On Giacomo’s self-consciousness of his position as a *lover* who *writes*, see Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 290–93. Brugnolo points out that many of Giacomo’s compositions take as their topic the “dicibilità stessa” of the state of being in love (293). For a translation of “Amor non vole,” see the “Texts in Translation,” pp. 174–75.

24. For the text of this poem, see Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 11–12.

25. Antonino Pagliaro, “Inviluti sono li scolosmini . . .” Mazzeo di Ricco also uses a Sicilian name related an Arabic word to refer to a gemstone. For Mazzeo, as for Giacomo, the gemstone serves as an image of something which is perceived to have value but, in fact, is worthless. And modern readers, again, have missed the reference, in this case because the lexical range of the word in modern Italian has shifted from its Sicilian and Arabic source. See the translation of “Sei anni ò travagliato” in “Texts in Translation,” p. 179, v. 32.

26. G. A. Cesareo, *Le origini della poesia lirica e la poesia siciliana sotto gli svevi*, 343.

27. Aurelio Roncaglia has demonstrated the extent to which Giacomo's translation is a bold and original literary intervention. For discussions of the Sicilians' poetic translations, see Roncaglia, "De quibusdam provincialibus translatis in lingua nostra"; Brugnolo, "La scuola poetica siciliana," 302–18, and Antonelli, "La corte 'italiana' di Federico II," 330–31.

Chapter 5

1. See Adolfo Gaspary, *La scuola poetica siciliana del secolo XIII*, 148–49, and Cesareo, *Le origini dell poesia lirica*, 437. The poetry in the voice of a woman has come to seem much less tantalizing to modern critics. Folena discusses it, but only in the context of a formal analysis of the Sicilian corpus, when discussing the *canzonetta*, because the extant poetry in the voice of a woman was written almost exclusively in that form ("Cultura e poesia dei siciliani," 322–28). Bruni mentions poetry in the voice of a woman *en passant*, again in the context of a formal discussion and under the sub-heading of the *canzonetta*, but adds: "After the approval won by these texts, read as popularizing works, among critics of Romantic tastes, there followed a much more reductive assessment of the works. But perhaps it is time to reconsider the question . . ." ("La cultura alla corte di Federico II," 262).

2. For the text of this poem, see Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 461–63; and see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 185–86.

3. For the text of this poem, see *ibid.*, 105–9; and see "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 180–82.

4. For the "malmaritata" poems, see "Di dolor convien cantare" ("I ought to sing of my pain") and "Per lo marito c'ò rio" ("Because of my wicked husband"). "L'altr'ieri fui in parlamento" ("The day before yesterday I was talking") blames the father for coming between the lady and her lover, and "Part'io mi cavalcava" ("There where I was riding") points a finger at the mother. "L'altr'ieri fui in parlamento" features a vicious old woman, in addition to the cruel father already mentioned.

5. Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 465, vv. 45–48.

6. *Ibid.*, 230, vv. 23–27.

7. "Ormai quando flore," in *ibid.*, 116, vv. 10–18.

8. For the text of this poem, see *ibid.*, 169–76. The same motif appears in Raimbaut de Vaqueiras's contrast, "Domna, tant vos ai preiada" ("Lady, so fervently have I beseeched you"), in which the poet pays tribute to his beloved in lofty Occitan verses, and she replies in the coarsest Genovese dialect.

9. For the text of this poem, see *ibid.*, 423–24, and Frederick II, *Rime*, 6–7; and see the "Texts in Translation" (below), pp. 177–78.

10. For the text of this poem, see Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 451–52 and Frederick II, *Rime*, 89–90.

11. I have chosen not to engage in the attribution skirmishes for the simple reason that I do not see the poetic persona of medieval love poetry as a reliable realist construction, let alone as *autobiographical* realism. Scholarly debates over attribution, however, constitute a useful register of changing fashions in scholarship. Thus, for instance, Bruno Panvini—one of the foremost scholars of the Sicilian poetry and editor of the authoritative edition of the corpus—doubted the attribution of "Dolze meo drudo" to Frederick because in that poem the lover speaks of one who has sovereignty over him, "words that are unlikely in the mouth of Frederick II, who had no

masters" (Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, xlvi). It should go without saying that few scholars of the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries would defend or challenge an attribution in similar terms.

12. For the text of this poem, see *ibid.*, 159–61 and Frederick II, *Rime*, 66–68.

13. For another example of a poet whose biography colors (or even eclipses) his literary achievement, see Giovanni di Brienne, also known as Re Giovanni. Made king of Jerusalem, he became Frederick's father-in-law when Frederick married his daughter Isabella. He lived to regret his daughter's fortuitous marriage, however. Frederick muscled Giovanni out of Jerusalem. Giovanni then was invited by the pope to seize control in Sicily, but Frederick, on his return from the Holy Land, swiftly reclaimed the lands won by his father-in-law. Giovanni left poems in French as well as a Sicilian discord (a poem in which each stanza follows a different metrical scheme) that begins, with a certain historical accuracy, "Lady, hear how I consider myself your man and not the servant of any other lord" ("Donna audite como" ["Lady, hear how"]); Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 85, vv. 1–3). And the poem ends—with a technical phrase that may strike the reader as almost excessively true to life—"let the ladies and the maidens surrender themselves (literally, "hand over their castles") without fear" (*ibid.*, 88, vv. 94–96).

And Pier delle Vigne—an accomplished Latin stylist who also left two Romance poems—served as a functionary in Frederick's government until Frederick, suspecting Pier of treason, had him blinded and thrown in jail, where he remained until he killed himself, reportedly by striking his head against the wall. Dante's depiction of Pier among the suicides (*Inferno* XIII) is one of the most vivid and moving of his infernal portraits. Pier's biography grants an additional poignancy to his elegant meditation on the bitterness of his beloved's death, "Amando con fin cor e co speranza" ("Loving with refined heart and with hope"; *ibid.*, 128–30).

14. Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana* 217, vv. 52–54.

15. It should be noted that Enzo's father died just one year after Enzo's incarceration. Either Enzo wrote this poem soon after his capture or he continued to invoke his father following his death, for the incantatory power of the invocation, if not its political efficacy.

16. *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii*, 59.

17. Falcandus, *La Historia*, 118.

18. And in this same passage, Peter calls Sicily the gate of hell: "Who, I ask, could live there free from care—where, aside from other perils, the mountains are always spewing hellfire and steaming with a sulphurous stench? [...] I tell you, the mountains of Trinacria are the gates of hell and of death, where men are swallowed up by the earth, and descend alive into hell." Peter of Blois to Richard, bishop of Syracuse (1173?), *Epistolae*, column 134.

19. See Petrus Ansolini de Ebulo, *De rebus siculis carmen*, 121–26 for the plot, and 165–66 for her confession of wrong-doing in the *affaire Constance*.

20. Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, 5, 16 (1: 202–3).

21. Giovanni Boccaccio, *On Famous Women*, 454.

22. For studies demonstrating the sophistication and the scope of the most recent research, see Hiroshi Takayama, *Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*; Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*; and Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*.

23. Ihsan 'Abbas, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 58, vv. 1 and 3, and 59, vv. 3–6; and see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 140–43.

24. Ibid., 150, vv. 6 and 8; and see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 144–45.

25. The Banu Rawaha originated in Medina and was prominent in Damascus and Tripoli during the Ayyubid period. It seems possible that this Banu Rawaha poet may have been Abu 'Ali al-Husayn (1121–89), whom biographers tell us was a poet, was taken prisoner in Sicily, and lived there for some time following his release.

26. 'Abbas, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 152–53.

27. Ibid., 44, vv. 12–16; and see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 143–44.

28. For poetic examples of linguistic borrowing from the Arabic, see the discussion of Giacomo's word “scolosmini” (above, pp. 78–79); Rinaldo d'Aquino's “colare/colle” (below, p. 180); and Mazzeo di Ricco's “jachiti” (below, p. 179).

29. Gaspary, *La scuola poetica siciliana*, 148–49.

30. For a translation of the story of Ibn 'Abbad's daughter, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 151–53.

Chapter 6

1. Leonardo Sciascia, *Occhio di capra*, 144.

2. This riddle – which uses plowing to represent writing – was widely diffused during the Middle Ages. See Aurelio Roncaglia, “Origini e tradizione,” 167 for a brief discussion of cognate versions.

3. Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 272–73.

4. In this discussion, I am using the terms *grammatica* and *grammaticae* idiosyncratically: to refer not to the *ars grammatica* but rather to the formal language (Latin, *fusha* Arabic, or *koine* Greek) as opposed to the vernacular. The term *grammatica* is not, of course, typically used to describe formal Arabic or Greek. And in modern scholarship on Latin literary history, it is generally used to refer to the *ars grammatica*, rather than to the formal, written language. I have adopted it here, for the sake of convenience, as shorthand for the three formal linguistico-literary traditions of the Kingdom of Sicily.

5. Eliot Weinberg, *Outside Stories*, 1987–91, 61.

6. I follow Marshal's dating (J. H. Marshal, *The Razos de Trobar of Raimon Vidal and Associated Texts*, lxx).

7. Elena Landoni, *La teoria letteraria dei provenzali*, 126.

8. Ibid., 85.

9. Marshal, *The Razos de Trobar of Raimon Vidal*, 2.

10. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, Dante's modern editor, cites Roger Bacon, who parallels the *grammatica* traditions of the Greeks, the Hebrews, and the Arabs (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, 31, n. 7).

11. Brugnolo, “La scuola poetica siciliana,” 266.

12. See Coluccia, “Storia editoriale e formazione del canone,” 46–51.

13. Another unretouched Sicilian fragment has recently been found, in a Swiss library, by scholar Giuseppina Brunetti. Her work on this text—to be called *Il frammento inedito “Resplendente stella de albur” di Giacomo Pugliese e la poesia italiana delle origini*—appeared too late to be consulted for this work.

14. Cesareo, *Le origini della poesia lirica*, 173–316.

15. See in particular Brugnolo, “La teoria della ‘rima trivocalica,’” which questions the extent of Tuscanization and the significance of the textual changes that *were* introduced by Tuscan copyists. At the same time, the excitement that greeted Brunetti’s recent discovery of Giacomo Pugliese’s *original* Sicilian text belies this new, cool attitude toward language.

16. For the text of this poem, Bruno Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 77–79.

17. Huillard-Bréholles and de Luynes, *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, vol. 6, p. 325.

18. Juan Andrés, *Dell’origine, de’ progressi, e dello state attuale d’ogni letteratura*, 1: 261.

19. Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, 3: 915–16.

20. Ibid., 1: 107.

21. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima*, 790; *The Muqaddimah*, 479–80.

22. Roberto Antonelli, “Canzoniere Vaticano latino 3793,” 37.

23. For a letter documenting the destruction of Muslim Lucera, see “Texts in Translation” (below), pp. 167–68.

24. Ramon Llull, *Vita coetanea*, 1: 2–3.

25. Ramon Llull, *Liber de civitate mundi*, 177.

26. See, in particular, the essays collected in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*.

For a full description and an edition of this text, inserted in manuscript 3236A of the Bibliothèque Nationale, see Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, “Les pérégrinations de l’âme dans l’autre monde d’après un anonyme de la fin du XIIe siècle.” On this work and Dante’s vision of the afterworld, see my “Dante e l’Islam.”

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Acknowledgments

This book covers more ground, linguistically speaking, than many studies published by junior scholars, and each language added seems to increase exponentially the debt owed to a larger community. To paraphrase Hillary Rodham Clinton, it takes a village to produce a monograph, and I would like to remember those whose knowledge, advice, patience, and enthusiasm made it possible to bring this book to press. At the earliest stage of its evolution, I benefited from the generous and gracious help of a particularly dynamic cohort of mentors. María Rosa Menocal, Bill Granara, Brian Stock, Michael Marmura, Hadia Dajani Shakeel, Robert Taylor, Suzanne Akbari, Amilcare Iannucci, and Massimo Ciavolella contributed their knowledge and a great deal more; the success of this project is in large part due to their thoughtful and perspicacious guidance. For help with the translations, I am particularly indebted to Bill Granara (who saw the need for them), Tarif Khalidi and Maher Jarrar (who helped me with the Arabic texts), Bill Paden (who gave me a hand with the *Book of Sydrac*), and George Rigg (who provided assistance with the translations from the Latin). Roger Abrahams contributed warm and provocative tutoring in contemporary parallels to the medieval literary transits I describe in this study. Of course, the errors that remain—despite these scholars' expertise and painstaking guidance—are mine alone. The American University of Beirut provided generous financial support, and I am grateful to the institution and to individuals there—not only Tarif and Maher but also Peter Heath and the community of AUB medievalists—who contributed to my work as administrators or colleagues.

And this list—limited as it is to the business end of things—tells half, if that much, of the story. All of the people I have named, and many more besides them, have contributed in ways less tangible yet every bit as crucial to this project. As it turns out, it takes a rather large village to produce a book. Instead of taxing the villagers' modesty (and the reader's patience) with a list of names—like the catalogues of collaborators that adorn modernist manifestos, like the extravagant thank-you's that festoon hip-hop liner notes—I enlist them, one more time, to understand implicitly their importance to me and to this work.

I dedicate this book to Evangeline, whose life began with pilgrimages to the meccas described in this work.

Parts of this book have appeared in earlier publications and are reprinted with the permission of the original publishers: portions of Chapter 2 appeared in *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* and the *Romanic Review*; portions of Chapter 4 appeared in the *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* and in *Mediaevalia*; portions of Chapters 2 and 4 appeared in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Al-Andalus* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); portions of Chapter 6 appeared in *Scripta Mediterranea*.